THE NEW
SUNDAY EXPRESS

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YAAS MAY TURN INTO A VERY SEVERE CYCLONIC STORM: IMD

It is likely to reach north Bay of Bengal near West Bengal and the north Odisha and Bangladesh coasts by May 26 morning

WIND SPEEDS UP TO 165 KMPH, HEAVY RAINS

Days after Tauktae pummeled the west coast and wreaked havoc, Yass' formation sent the National Crisis Management Committee into a huddle on Saturday. Attending the meeting, the IMD said the cyclone will pack wind speeds up to 155-165 kmph, accompanied by heavy rainfall and storm surges in the coastal districts and recommended large scale evacuations

85 NDRF TEAMS, ARMY, SHIPS ON STAND-BY

- While the NDRF will deploy 85 teams, the army, navy and coast guard, along with ships and aircraft, will also chip in for rescue
- Covid-appropriate shelters set up, with adequate stocks of food grains, drinking water, medicines and other essential supplies
- Works on to ensure uninterrupted oxygen and medicine supplies

6th

NAMED BY OMAN, IT IS THE 6TH STORM OVER NORTH INDIAN OCEAN THIS YEAR

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

INTERVIEW

High positivity rate due to focused tests, says TAC chief

RAMU PATIL @ Bengaluru

EVEN as Covid deaths and positivity rate continue to remain high, State Covid Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Chairman Dr MK Sudarshan said the high positivity rate is due to focused testing of symptomatic people and primary contacts of Covid-positive patients.

The situation is improving and is likely to stabilise by the end of next month, he said and added that the 14-day lockdown has had a fairly good effect as there has been some decline in the number of cases and test positivity rate. On Saturday, the state reported 31,183 new cases and 451 deaths, and the day's positivity rate was at 24.21 per cent. On May 9, a day before the 14-day lockdown was announced, Karnataka had reported 47,930 new cases and 490 deaths, and the positivity rate was at 32.71 per cent. The existing lockdown has been extended by another 14 days till June 7.

The TAC chief emphasised on stricter enforcement of the lockdown to fight the pandemic.

FULL INTERVIEW: P4

The worst is yet to come for developing nations: IMF

Says India is a warning of possible events in other low- and middle-income countries that so far have seemingly escaped the pandemic

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

INDIA's second Covid wave is a warning for things to come in low- and middle-income countries that have escaped the pandemic till now, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

"The ongoing catastrophic second wave in India, following a terrible wave in Brazil, is a sign the worst may be yet to come in the developing world," said a report co-authored by IMF's Chief Economist Gita Gopinath and economist Ruchir Agarwal.

In the first wave, India's healthcare system held up fairly well but this time, the country's medical infrastructure seems to be crumbling under the case load, the discussion paper noted.

According to the note, the vaccine coverage in India is expected to remain under 35% of the population by the end of 2021. To get to 60% coverage, India will need to immediately place sufficient vaccine orders of about 1 billion doses through contracts that incentivise investment in additional capacity and augmentation of the supply chain, it added.

"In this context, the recently announced financing of about $600 million to the Serum Institute of India and Bharat Biotech to boost production capacity in the near term is a welcome step," the report said, adding that authorities estimate two billion doses will be available by the end of 2021.

"India is a warning of possible events in other low- and middle-income countries that so far have seemingly escaped the pandemic, including in Africa," the report said.

For India, current bilateral purchases of vaccine plus coverage from Covax will cover about 25% of its population by the first half of 2022.

Covid-19 Vaccines Global Access, or Covax, is a worldwide initiative for equitable access to Covid vaccines.

The IMF report said India continues to face vaccine production bottlenecks, including due to ongoing shortages of critical raw materials.

According to IMF, urgent steps should be taken to eliminate constraints on cross-border exports of critical raw materials and finished vaccines.

A RAINY AFTERNOON

As heavy rain lashes Bengaluru, a pedestrian shields herself with an umbrella, on Mysuru Road on Saturday | SHRIRAM BN

Covid -ve report a must to enter K'taka: Bommai

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Hubballi, Belagavi, Bengaluru

HOME Minister **Basavaraj Bommai** on Saturday said that those entering Karnataka from other States by road should mandatorily produce RTPCR-negative reports.

The State Government has kept a strict vigil on the movement of vehicles at all entry points along the border, as instructed by the Central government, he told reporters at Shiggaon.

"For stricter implementation of lockdown, a heavy deployment of police force has been made in border districts. The RTCPCR negative report for those travelling from other states is part of this move," he clarified.

He asked officials in border districts of Belagavi, Vijayapura, Bidar, Kalaburagi and Mangaluru to increase checking of vehicles coming in from other states.

Belagavi SP Laxman Nimbargi said, "The Health Department insists that people entering from Maharashtra and Goa should produce RT-PCR negative reports. This has been going on for several weeks now. They should produce the report within 72 hours of entering the state."

The Airports Authority of India at airports and the Railway Department at railway stations have been checking negative test reports of interstate travellers, the SP said.

Police impound 2,309 vehicles in Bengaluru

The Bengaluru police on Saturday seized 2,039 vehicles and registered 35 cases against shops and commercial establishments for violating lockdown norms. The police also detained some people who were moving around on vehicles without valid reasons and released them later on station bail.

A senior police officer said that they have put up barricades across the city to restrict the movement of people during lockdown hours, and that patrolling has been intensified. Checkpoints have been put up at entry and exit points of the city, he added.

WITH THIS ISSUE
THE UNSCRUPULOUS INDIAN
PLUS 12 PAGES MAGAZINE

RAMDEV
MISLED PEOPLE: IMA

It urged the Centre to take action against the Yoga guru for making unscientific statements against modern medicine | P7

NATIONWIDE	MAY 21	MAY 22
Fresh cases	2,59,551	2,57,299
Recoveries	3,57,295	3,57,630
Deaths	4,209	4,194

KARNATAKA	MAY 21	MAY 22
Fresh cases	32,218	31,183
Recoveries	52,581	61,766
Deaths	353	451

JAB-O-METER
TAKE YOUR SHOT
May 21: **13,83,358 doses**
May 22: **15,52,126 doses**
TOTAL DOSES: 19,49,51,603

EXPRESS READ

Nepal Prez dissolves House, snap polls in Nov

Kathmandu: Nepal President Bidya Devi Bhandari dissolved the House of Representatives on Saturday for the second time in five months, and announced snap elections in the Himalayan nation in November, rejecting both embattled Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli and the Opposition alliance's claims to form a government. The move is expected to be legally challenged yet again.

B'luru sees 40 child marriages since Jan 2020

BALA CHAUHAN @ Bengaluru

A 16-year-old HIV-positive married girl from north Karnataka was rescued in Bengaluru in January this year by the police and produced before the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) after she lodged a complaint against her husband over domestic violence.

"The minor, when produced before the CWC, narrated to us that she got married when she was 14 to a 22-year-old man in Bengaluru. Her first born died after five months. She had conceived again, but suffered a miscarriage five months into her pregnancy," said Chairperson, CWC (for girls aged between six and 18 years), Bengaluru Urban jurisdiction, Anjali Ramanna.

Subsequent to his arrest under the Prohibition of Child Marriage (Karnataka Amendment) Act, 2016, the minor's husband was found to be HIV-positive.

"The girl, when sent for medical examination, was also found to be HIV-positive. We tried to track her family in Raichur and found her mother, who worked as house help in the neighbouring state. She refused to come to Bengaluru to meet her daughter. We also found out that the girl was HIV-positive at birth and has been on antiretroviral therapy (ART) drugs for a long time," said the Child Welfare Committee chairperson.

The minor has been sent to an institution for HIV-positive children for care and support under the CWC supervision.

Bengaluru, the IT City, has a dark underbelly marred with crimes against children. Child marriage is one of them.

"The CWC Bengaluru Urban jurisdiction has received 40 cases of child marriage between January 2020 and May 1 this year," the CWC chairperson added.

CONTINUED ON: P5

Steroid overuse sparked black fungus cases, says Centre; tally at 8,848

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

THE Centre on Saturday released a national list of mucormycosis (black fungus) infection case count among the convalescing Covid patients, placing the number at 8,848. It blamed uncontrolled and irrational use of steroids as part of Covid-19 treatment regimen for the infection, but said it was not an outbreak. Admitting that the supply of Amphotericin B, a drug used to treat the infection, was limited, it said efforts were on to ramp up the production capacity.

"Amphotericin B's availability and supply is being raised. The department of Pharma is coordinating with the Ministry of Health to provide license to five additional manufacturers. The existing manufacturers are working towards increasing their production capacity," said Lav Agarwal, joint secretary of the health ministry.

Meanwhile, stating that Covid was not responsible for black fungus cases, Dr VK Paul, NITI Aayog's member (health), said: "Steroids are wonder drugs that help save lives, but when irrational doses are given, they have a negative impact. One of them is black fungus."

Stating that the infection existed even during pre-Covid times, he said: "It is an uncommon illness that primarily affects the diabetic, but it has not spread in the form of an outbreak."

As per official data, 23,000 vials of Amphotericin B have been sent to the worst-hit states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra and Telangana, among others.

According to AIIMS, New Delhi, chief Dr Randeep Guleria, persistent headache or swelling on one side of the face were some of the symptoms of the rare infection. He said discolouration in the mouth and decreased sensation in any part of the face, too, were signs that convalescent patients must consult a doctor.

LONGER WAIT

Vaccine for 18-44 group not open yet, clarifies State Govt

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE State Government has changed its vaccination policy again. Two days after announcing that it would restart the vaccination process for the 18-44 age group, National Health Mission (NHM) Director Dr Arundhathi Chandrashekhar issued a clarification on Saturday that vaccines are currently not available and even identified frontline workers, vulnerable groups and priority members will be informed of the date and time of vaccination by nodal officers.

Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar had earlier tweeted, "From May 22, vaccination for people in the 18-44 age group will resume. State government-identified frontline workers and priority groups will be vaccinated first." P5

Boosted by RBI's dividend gift, FinMin asks PSUs to ramp up capital spending

ANURADHA SHUKLA @ New Delhi

ENCOURAGED by the more-than-expected dividend handout from the Reserve Bank of India, the finance ministry has asked Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) to exceed their Capex target by 20-25% than what was originally given in the budget and also to use reserve to increase dividend.

The ministry has sent an internal note to the top management of CPSEs in this regard, a senior official told *TNIE*. "Last year, many CPSEs failed to increase their capex in the first half. It was done only after the FM nudged them to do so in several meetings. Learning from the lessons from the first wave, they have been asked to be prompt and scale up so that it will help economic recovery," the official said.

Last year, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her meetings with CPSE heads constantly followed up to increase capital spending to make up for the curb in expenditure. It worked. CPSEs in the oil and gas sector alone recorded a capex of ₹5,610 crore in April, higher than what they had spent the previous year.

As the government is likely to miss the divestment target, it is banking on extra dividend.

On Friday, RBI announced it would transfer ₹99,122 crore as surplus to the Centre for the nine months ended March 31.

AGAINST ALL ODDS

Positive attitude beats age, nonagenarians cured of Covid

IFFATH FATHIMA & DIVYA CUTINHO @ Bengaluru, Mangaluru

WITH right diagnosis, timely treatment and positive attitude, there is hope for even people in their ripe old age who have tested Covid-positive.

In heart-warming incidents, an elderly couple -- 95-year-old R Vasanth, an ex-service man who served the British Army during World War 2, and his wife, 90-year-old Laskhmi Devi, in Bengaluru and 95-year-old Alice Pinto, a co-morbid patient, in Mangaluru were discharged from hospital.

The Bengaluru couple, who tested positive for Covid in April last week, came out of Bowring Hospital on Friday evening.

Vasanth and Lakshmi, who live by themselves in Uttarahalli, had developed symptoms of diarrhoea and fever, and they got tested. When the tests came positive, their family members decided not to tell them that they were Covid-positive, but they had been infected by a viral infection that needed medication.

CONTINUED ON: P5

Nonagenarians R Vasanth and his wife, Lakshmi Devi | EXPRESS

FEWER TESTS LEADING TO DIP IN CASES: CONG

The Opposition Congress on Saturday hit out at the State Government, accusing it of instilling a false sense of confidence among the people by claiming that Covid cases have reduced in the state. Former CM Siddaramaiah stated the numbers have come down only because of reduced testing. P3

THE NEW SUNDAY EXPRESS | BRIGHTSIDE

ALMANAC TODAY
Sunday : 23/05/2021 • Year: Plava • Ayana: Uttharayana
Ritu: Vasantha • Masa: Vaishala • Paksha: Shukla • Tithi: Dwadashi 12.19 am
Nakshatra: Hastha 8.45 am • Moon in Tula Rashi • Rahukaala: 04:30 pm to 06:00 pm
Gulikakala: 03:00 pm to 04:30 pm • Yamaganda: 12:00 pm to 01:30 pm

WEATHER
MIN 21°C | MAX 30°C
FORECAST
Showers late. Cloudy

Sunrise 5.53 am
Sunset 6.40 pm
Moonrise 3.37 pm
Moonset 3.06 am

02 BENGALURU | SUNDAY 23.05.2021 | newindianexpress.com

Still from the video: Who are these Kudiyas?

A Bengaluru organisation is building a multimedia archive of tribal music in Karnataka, starting with the Kudiyas of Kodagu

NOTES OF A LIFE IN MUSIC

ANISHA SHETH @ Bengaluru

A life without songs sung to the beats of drums is probably unimaginable for the Kudiya people of the Western Ghats.

"We sing about the plants and trees in the forests, the roots, stones, snakes, and elephants… There is a rhythm to each song, and we play the drum to that rhythm," Kudiya musician Sharada Somaiah says in an interview with Bengaluru-based Gobal Kulture, which is taking the first steps towards building an archive of tribal music in Karnataka.

On April 13, Global Kulture released a 2.50-minute video titled "Hidden Sounds: Who are these Kudiyas?" on its YouTube channel. They've started with the Kudiya community, but Arun Sivag, percussionist and founder of Global Kulture, says the idea is to collect audio and video recordings of songs, interviews and dances of artistes from 40 communities (the state government lists 50 Scheduled Tribes), and compile it into the Budakattu Music Archive, a partial multimedia ethnography of tribal music and culture.

"It took one-and-a-half years of research to figure out how to go about this," says Arun. This includes conversations with several people – including playback singer and co-founder of Global Kulture, Sangeetha Ravindranath, and Sumanto Mondal, who is editorial and communications partner at the organisation.

However, the idea of the archive comes from Arun's own experiences, and thoughts about music and musicians. "I always saw musicians on the street, and wondered why they weren't on stage. Folk artistes are not given a stage, but they are the torchbearers of music," says the 29-year-old.

In 2019, he began visiting government offices looking for a list of tribal musicians, and realised that the government didn't really have one. But the idea stuck, and he came in contact with folk and tribal art expert Srinivas Murthy, who worked with Sharada's father decades ago.

With the little footage they collected in February at Sharada's house in Tora village (Virajpet, Kodagu), they know they've barely scratched the surface. "One would need a whole life to understand their music. We are doing what the government is supposed to do," says Arun.

The Kudiyas' culture is oral — their songs and stories are the historical record of their existence. "They sing songs while working, after getting back from work, when there is a birth or a death, during festivals… They even have a song about the daughters of the tribe and how they wish the best for them," says Sangeetha, who is working on translating the songs from Kodava to English.

The archive will also have interviews of the artistes, such as the one in which Sharada talks about the community's origin story, and why they call themselves Kudiyas, says Mondal, who is translating her interviews from Kannada to English.

They are looking for institutional funding that will allow them to retain creative independence. But for now, they are using their own resources to fund the project. Arun put in the stipend he got from OneBeat, a US government fellowship. A part of that was used as honorarium for the artistes.

"We are artists too. We want to pay them for their work. Right now, the only opportunities they have are annual performances at Vidhana Soudha and Ravindra Kalakshetra (auditorium in Bengaluru). When the government calls, these are the people who get the peanuts," Arun says.

Sharada's earnings are paltry and not steady, like many artistes. She pretty much kept the music of her community alive by teaching younger generations, but knows survival is at stake without economic opportunity. In the trailer, Sharada talks about her "biggest dream". "…If our art is to survive, the government and other organisations must help us get a good platform, give us respect. Only if this happens will our music become a livelihood for us and for our children, and only this way will our art survive."

Arun too has big dreams. He eventually wants tribal musicians to get the recognition and remuneration they deserve. "We want to build a not-for-profit artist management system for them. They should be treated just like any other artiste."

> There is so much to learn from them. They make their own instruments, which takes years to learn. And they play their music with no gig at hand. They're hopeful (of recognition) when they don't have a goal. That's true dedication
>
> — Arun Sivag, founder, Global Kulture

PIC A SHOT

Preserving history

Global Kulture aims to collect audio and video recordings of songs, interviews and dances of artists from 40 communities and compile it into the Budakattu Music Archive,

Desi and wholesome

A young software engineer shifted gears to a new career, turning organic farmer and agripreneur

G SUBHASH CHANDRA @ Davanagere

FROM the air-conditioned office cubicle to the sultry, rocky plains of Challakere in Chitradurga district. From coding to ploughing. Two diverse worlds – Roja Reddy traversed from one to the other, compelled by the call of her roots.

Back in her village on work from home duty in April 2020, Roja decided to cast aside the trappings of her job in a reputed company and venture into the uncharted territory of organic farming. The IT sector, too, was buffeted by the pandemic, and with pink slips being handed out, Roja knew it was time for a change.

Donnehalli village, where the grass is dry and water scarce, held little hope for Roja. Her father and brother, fed up with the losses of agriculture, had all but abandoned farming. But Roja took it up as a challenge, gaining guidance from progressive farmers to grow nearly 35 varieties of vegetables on six acres of land. She has now established her own brand, Nisarga Native Farms, provides employment to a number of workers and her earnings run into lakhs of rupees.

Roja Reddy at her field at Donnehalli in Challakere taluk

It wasn't easy in the beginning. Despite her hard work and perseverance, her techniques drew ridicule from relatives, other farmers and villagers, and even officials of the department of horticulture.

At a time when many youngsters are shunning agriculture, citing it a gamble with the monsoon, Roja learnt the desi style of growing multiple crops with limited supply of water. Her agricultural background and availability of land in drought-prone Challakere came in handy. She got the support of her father and brother, who initially resisted the idea but later stood rock-steady behind her. Within the span of one year, Roja Reddy became an expert farmer.

Slowly, those who had mocked her came forward to learn about the new methods, and Roja's home in the village has become a hub of sorts for organic produce. In fact, Donnehalli village has transformed into an organic village, yielding good revenue while keeping costs low.

"We get high quality seeds from Belagavi, Maharashtra and other places, they give us wholesome vegetables," she said. The produce is sold in the markets of Manipal, Udupi and Mangaluru, where her biggest customers are doctors, and also at the weekly organic market at JCR Extension in Chitradurga.

"Organic farming not only provides good income but has also made me an agripreneur, and I am employing unskilled labourers who are in large numbers in our country. This has given me a great deal of satisfaction," Roja said. "My dad and brother, who were frustrated with agriculture due to shortage of water, are now busy growing, packing and transporting vegetables."

Fenugreek, asparagus, celery, carrot, knolkol, radish, capsicum, chillies, ridge gourd, tinda, amaranthus, spinach, cauliflower, broccoli, mint, beetroot, bottle gourd, ash gourd, cabbage and other vegetables are grown on the farm without the intervention of inorganic materials, said Roja. Demand for such produce is growing across the state. "It is not possible to meet this demand, so I request other farmers to hand over their produce to me, so it can be sold in different parts of the state, and I can get them good revenue too," she added. With a daily income in five figures, she is looking to grow her business.

She, along with other progressive farmers, are advocating this method of raising "authentic vegetables", their aim to give Karnataka a healthier future.

Counters in Bengaluru, Udupi

Roja has big ideas for her brand, Nisarga Native Farms. She wants to form an organic farmers' co-operative in Donnehalli, and start online vegetable sales, besides setting up counters in Bengaluru to sell fresh and high-quality vegetables at affordable prices. "I also want to develop an app to market the produce. With swift transport facilities available, we can deliver vegetables hygienically at customers' doorsteps," she says. However, she concedes the idea is still in a nascent stage.

Roja currently uses private buses to transport produce to Bengaluru and Udupi-Manipal, but wants to set up her own transport fleet when she takes up online operations. "I have a set of permanent customers in Udupi and Manipal, who collect their parcels every morning when the bus reaches," she said.

> I also want to develop an app to market the produce. With swift transport facilities available, we can deliver vegetables hygienically at customers' doorsteps
>
> — Roja Reddy

Vegetables grown by Roja being sold at a weekend market in Chitradurga

EXPRESS READ

Firms donate oxygen concentrators

Bengaluru: Two private companies — TVS Motors and Xylem Water Solutions India Pvt Ltd — on Saturday donated 20 and 35 oxygen concentrators, respectively, to the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP). BBMP Chief Commissioner Gaurav Gupta said that these concentrators will be used at triaging centers and Covid Care Centres managed by the civic body to ensure that oxygen support is given to the patients in timely manner. **ENS**

A convention hall, which has been converted into a Covid Care Centre, opened its doors to the public at JJ Nagar in Bengaluru on Saturday | SHRIRAM B N

Cooperate during home checks: BBMP chief

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

THE Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) staffers have started the exercise of door-to-door surveys to check on vaccination and testing. But citizens are not cooperating, claiming that they do not want to get tested or vaccinated, BBMP Chief Commissioner Gaurav Gupta revealed on Saturday.

He said the exercise has been undertaken to take stock if there are adequate facilities for home isolation and to check on primary and secondary contacts. "But people are not coming forward. This should not be the attitude," he said. Gupta was speaking to the media on the sidelines of the inauguration of a 100-bed Covid Care Centre, set up by the Indian Army in the military compound on St John's Road, Ulsoor.

On the need for shifting patients from CCCs and triaging centres to hospitals immediately, Gupta said software modulations to the bed allocation portal were being discussed and worked upon, where patients will be treated as directly preferred to hospitals, when referred from these centres, skipping the process of calling 1912.

Gupta added that the 100-bed CCC will have 40 oxygenated beds. Arrangements in all CCCs have been made to have dedicated oxygen beds, round-the-clock doctors and nurses and ambulance services to shift patients.

Each CCC and triaging centre is also connected to hospitals to shift patients immediately.

On compensation for civic workers who died due to Covid-19, Gupta said that last year, an insurance scheme was introduced, but this year, the government has decided to give them Rs 10 lakh each.

Decision on Class 12, entrance exams likely today

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru

A DECISION on holding Class 12 examinations and entrance exams for professional courses is likely to be taken on Sunday (May 23). On the eve of the meeting with several Union ministers, education ministers of states and Union Territories, education secretaries and chairpersons of state examination boards and stakeholders, Union Minister for Education Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' on Saturday sought feedback on a social media platform. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Union Minister for Women and Child Development Smriti Irani and Information and Broadcasting Minister Prakash Javadekar will participate.

"The Ministry of Education and CBSE are exploring options regarding the conduct of examinations, keeping in mind the safety and security of students and teachers. The Department of Higher Education is also deliberating on the finalisation of the dates of examinations for institutions of higher learning," said Pokhriyal, in a letter to Union Territories and states. He also noted the delay in Class 12 examinations by CBSE and ICSE, and entrance examinations by institutes offering professional courses.

"The Prime Minister has desired that any decision affecting the careers of students has to be taken in wide consultations with all state governments & stakeholders. I recently held a meeting with the State Education Secretaries in this regard," Pokriyal said in a tweet. Lawyer and child rights activist Anubha Shrivastava Sahai, who is also president of the India Wide Parents Association, lauded the consultative initiative by the minister.

Meanwhile, a section of Twitter users also demanded cancellation of the Class 12 board examination. A campaign against the examinations was also planned for May 23.

Supreme Court advocate Tanvi Dubey, quoting excerpts from the judgment in the Amit Bathla vs CBSE case, where an assessment scheme is issued, said that similar steps must be considered, as postponement of exams is not the solution and it's "practically impossible to physically conduct exams." In the excerpt, the result of the students (whose exams are not completed) will be declared based on performance in the appeared subjects and performance in internal/practical project assessment.

Compensate kin of teachers who died on Covid duty, DCs told

PEARL MARIA DSOUZA @ Bengaluru

THE Education Department has asked the deputy commissioners of districts to provide compensation to the families of teachers and staffers who died of Covid-19 while on Covid duty. A top official said that the staffers were appointed by the district commissioners for Covid duty. The families of these teachers are bound to receive around Rs 30 lakh in insurance, said the official. However, these benefits were restricted to government teachers, staffers and those outsourced for Covid duty.

The Deputy Director of Public Instruction has been asked to follow up on the compensation and also provide information on those families eligible for compensation.

Meanwhile, the department has initiated the process to appoint the kin of those teachers or staffers, who died on duty be it Covid or otherwise (prior to their retirement), on compassionate grounds in Group D, first division assistant or second division assistant roles. In a letter issued to the DCs, Commissioner of Public Instruction Anbu Kumar also reminded them to provide financial relief to the families of those who died of Covid even if they were deputed for other duties such as election.

Private schools, in the meantime, have been demanding some relief. Minister for Primary and Secondary Education S Suresh Kumar had written to Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa on Thursday to announce a relief package for unaided school teachers and staffers as several parents did not pay the fees for the previous academic year when classes were held online.

> Provide financial relief to the families of those who died of Covid even if they were deputed for other duties such as election
>
> Anbu Kumar, Commissioner of Public Instruction
>
> The staffers were appointed by the DCs for Covid duty. The families of these teachers are bound to receive around Rs 30 lakh in insurance
>
> Official

The Health Department's decision to resume vaccination for the 18-44 age group belonging to certain frontline workers and priority groups from Saturday failed to take off in Bengaluru, as the orders appointing nodal officers for the respective categories of beneficiaries were passed only by the evening

TALL CLAIMS

Covid numbers down due to reduced testing: Siddu

Former CM says govt has ordered not to test asymptomatic people

Opposition leader Siddaramaiah at the new 80-oxygen bed hospital for non-Covid patients at Chamarajpet, in Bengaluru on Saturday | EXPRESS

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@Bengaluru

THE Opposition Congress on Saturday accused the State Government of instilling a false sense of confidence among the people by claiming that Covid-19 cases have reduced in the state.

Former Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said the numbers have come down only because of reduced testing. "The government is instilling a false sense of confidence by claiming that Covid-19 cases have reduced. In reality, it is only because of reduced testing. The order by the National Health Mission director has exposed the lies," the former CM tweeted.

Citing a government order issued on April 25, in which directions have been issued to conduct more focused testing and stop random testing of asymptomatic persons, the former CM said, "The government has ordered not to test asymptomatic people for Covid-19. This is the reason for the low count in the state. Is the Chief Minister even aware of the implications of such an order?" he asked.

An asymptomatic person may infect many more people if that person is not tested and this put the lives of many at risk. That is one of the reasons for the rise in cases even during the lockdown, he pointed out.

Siddaramaiah said during the first week of May, around 49,000 cases were reported daily and the government claimed that it dropped to 38,000 in just a few days after the lockdown was imposed. However, they never spoke about the 1,77,560 tests done on April 1 which that dropped to 97,000 on May 17, he pointed out.

'Govt package came after Oppn pressure'

ENS @Belagavi

KPCC Working President Satish Jarkiholi on Saturday lambasted the state government for announcing a special package of Rs 1,250 crore only under pressure from the Opposition and not to actually help people in distress.

"Without elaborating on any welfare measures to help people cope with the ongoing tough times, the government merely announced the package sans any purpose," alleged Jarkiholi.

The government in Tamil Nadu announced financial assistance of Rs 4,000 each for those in crisis, while the AP government decided to extend free treatment to Covid patients in both government and private hospitals, said Jarkiholi, taking the state government to task for not making any such concrete efforts to alleviate the woes of the people, apart from announcing a relief package. While beds were available in most of the government hospitals in the state, there has been a severe shortage of oxygen and support staff, he alleged.

ASHA workers across country to go on strike tomorrow

BENGALURU: ASHA workers from across the country will go on a strike on Monday in protest against the government for not providing them with essential safety kits during the pandemic, and paying them minimum renumeration despite being frontline workers. The All-India Committee of Scheme Workers' Federation of India (SWFI) said that ASHA workers have not been provided with essential PPE kits to safeguard their own lives and many have become infected, with some even succumbing to the virus. "Even the pittance of a compensation declared by government for the next of kin of ASHA workers remains just on paper. The packages declared by various governments have been denied to them," they said. They are demanding that the government release Rs 5,000 as Covid relief package for all ASHA workers and other frontline warriors across the country, provide a minimum of Rs 25,000 as medical compensation, ensure adequate supply of masks, hand sanitizers, gloves and other safety equipment and release Rs 50 lakh insurance compensation for ASHA workers who succumbed during the Covid-9 pandemic's first wave. ENS

Is Constitution different for Congress, asks KSE

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Shivamogga

REACTING sharply to the intent expressed by former Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to move a privileged motion for not permitting him to hold a meeting with deputy commissioners, RDPR Minister KS Eshwarappa questioned if the norms of the Constitution are different for Congress and BJP.

Talking to the media on Saturday, Eshwarappa further questioned why the Siddaramaiah-led Congress government prevented him (when Eshwarappa was Opposition leader) from holding a meeting in the district office of the deputy commissioner about the drought situation.

Further, he said that he was informed by the deputy commissioner that as an Opposition leader, there was no permission to hold meeting in the deputy commissioner's office.

Eshwarappa remembered that he then wrote a letter to CM Siddaramaiah seeking permission, but didn't get a reply. "So, when the Congress government denied permission then, then how they can expect it now? Are Constitution norms different for Congress and BJP?" he asked. He also alleged that Congress leaders who ridiculed covid vaccination are now politicising the issue. He alleged that Congress' "double standards" is the reason behind many people not opting for the vaccine. Further, he alleged that Congress should be held responsible for the increasing Covid cases in the country.

K'taka vaccinates all prisoners above 45 yrs

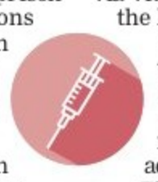
BALA CHAUHAN @ Bengaluru

IN perhaps a first in the country, all prisoners in Karnataka aged 45 years and above have received their first dose of Covid vaccination. Over 15,000 prisoners are lodged in various prisons across the State, and 2,167 of them are aged 45 years and above.

"All prisoners in the State have received their first dose of vaccine. They will be administered the second dose as per the revised vaccination protocols. Some of them may also have received their second dose," said Director General of Police and DG, Prisons & Correctional Services, Alok Mohan.

He added that as per the recent government order, prison authorities will identify eligible prisoners aged between 18 and 44 years for vaccination.

Speaking to *TNIE*, the prison chief said that the Prisons Department, along with the help of the Department of Health and Family Welfare and district administration, have taken up vaccination of prisoners, including under trials and those serving life terms, on a war-footing.



He added that the mass vaccination drive has covered convicts and undertrial prisoners in the eligible age brackets.

In another major move to implement one of the key prison reforms and to contain Covid spread, around 90 per cent of prisoners in Karnataka have been produced before courts via video conferencing (VC) in the last one year, he said.

"Before March last year, the number of prisoners being produced before court through VC was negligible," Mohan added.

The prison chief said that in view of the recent Supreme Court direction to decongest prisons in the wake of the ongoing pandemic, the prison authorities are once again identifying prisoners for interim bail and parole.

The apex, court while taking note of the "unprecedented surge" in Covid-19 cases, had recently moved to decongest prisons and ordered the immediate release of prisoners, who were granted bail or parole last year by the high-powered committees of states and Union Territories.

Soon after the outbreak of the pandemic, the Supreme Court on March 23, 2020, had directed all states and UTs to constitute HPCs to consider releasing of prisoners on parole or interim bail and under trial prisoners for offences entailing up to seven-year jail term to decongest prisons.

Ravi hits out at Cong over 'toolkit' row

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@Bengaluru

A day after the Centre directed Twitter to remove the "manipulated media" tag from the toolkit posts, BJP National General Secretary **C T Ravi** hit out at the Congress.

"The Congress toolkit to defame India is not fake. It was created to defame the Prime Minister and the country and try to take advantage of the situation," Ravi told reporters here.

The Congress, however, had earlier rubbished the BJP's allegations made against the party and had termed the toolkit as fake.

In response, Ravi said the "actions and reactions of many Congress leaders were similar to what was mentioned in the toolkit". "Circumstantial evidence shows that it was not just a coincidence. They made all attempts to defame the country," he said.

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IN THE COURT OF THE 5TH ADDITIONAL FAMILY JUDGE AT BENGALURU
M.C. No. 2814/2020

BETWEEN:
Mrs. Dr. Suma Jayaram ...Petitioner
AND:
C. Mahesh & Another ...Respondents
SUIT SUMMONS/ NOTICE TO RESPONDENTS

1. **Mr. C. Mahesh,** S/o Late Mr. Chandra Shekar, Aged about 41 years, R/a # 91, 3rd Cross, Telecom Colony, New Timberyard Layout, Bengaluru-560 026.
2. **Mrs. Pramoda Chavan,** Aged about 35 years, r/at No. 33, 3rd Main Road, Byatarayanapura, Bengaluru-560 026.

Whereas the above named petitioner has instituted a petition U/s 13 (1) (i) and (i a) of the Hindu marriage Act 1955 against the Respondent seeking a decree of divorce. The Respondent is hereby summoned to appear in this Court in person or through a pleader duly instructed and able to answer all the material facts, questions relating to the petition or who shall be accompanied by some person able to answer all such questions **on 15.06.2021 at 11.A.M** in the forenoon to answer the claim.

Take notice that default of your appearance on the day above mentioned, the petition will be heard and determined in your absence.

Given under my hand and seal of this Court this 17th day of April 2021.

By Order of the Court
Sd/- Sheristedar,
Family Court, Bengaluru.

Advocate for Petitioner:
N. Gowtham Raghunath,
Lakshmy Iyengar Associates,
Office at: # 203, 2nd Floor, Brigade Business Suites, # 44, 100 feet Road, Jayanagar 2nd Block, Ashoka Pillar, Bengaluru-560 011.
Ph: 7204754954 / 9740622117

In the court of the I Addl District Judge, Anantapur.
O.S.No. 26 of 2019.

Parnandi Manju Bhargavi Plaintiff: S.Maha Lakshmi, & others. Defendants

Suit Summons Notice to Defendant No-26 T.N. Vijaya Kumar Reddy, aged about 43 years, S/o Narasimha Reddy E-297 36 NITS layout KS town Kengeri Satellite town Bangalore 560060 Karnataka state.

Please take notice that the Plaintiff filed the above suit for partition of her 7/30 th share in the suit schedule properties situate at Thanakallu Mandalam of Anantapur Distr AP and above suit is coming up for your appearance and you are hereby informed to be present in the above court on...14/6/2021 at about 10.30 a.m., and offer your objections claims etc., either in person or through counsel failing which the matter will be heard exparte
//by order //
Date of adjournment : 14/06/2021

S.Vidya Sagar, Madanapalle.
S.Surendrachary, Anantapur.
Advocates for Plaintiff

IN THE COURT OF THE 5TH ADDITIONAL FAMILY JUDGE AT BENGALURU
G & WC No. 154/2020

BETWEEN:
Dr. Suma Jayaram ...Petitioner
AND:
C. Mahesh ...Respondent
SUIT SUMMONS / NOTICE TO RESPONDENT

Mr. C. Mahesh, S/o Late Mr. Chandra Shekar, Aged about 41 years, R/a # 91, 3rd Cross, Telecom Colony, New Timberyard Layout, Bengaluru-560 026.

Whereas the above named petitioner has instituted a petition U/s 7 & 17 of the Guardians & Wards Act 1890 against the Respondent seeking legal custody of her Daughter **'AAKANSHA'** aged about 9 years and her Son **'SUSHANTH'** aged about 2 years 3 months. The Respondent is hereby summoned to appear in this Court in person or through a pleader duly instructed and able to answer all material facts, questions relating to the petition or who shall be accompanied by some person able to answer all such questions **on 15.06.2021 at 11.A.M** in the forenoon to answer the claim.

Take notice that default of your appearance on the day above mentioned, the petition will be heard and determined in your absence.

Given under my hand and seal of this Court this 17th day of April 2021.

By Order of the Court
Sd/- Sheristedar,
Family Court, Bengaluru.

Advocate for Petitioner:
N. Gowtham Raghunath,
Lakshmy Iyengar Associates,
Office at: # 203, 2nd Floor, Brigade Business Suites, # 44, 100 feet Road, Jayanagar 2nd Block, Ashoka Pillar, Bengaluru-560 011.
Ph: 7204754954 / 9740622117

KITTUR RANI CHANNAMMA RESIDENTIAL SAINIK SCHOOL FOR GIRLS, KITTUR-591 115 DT: BELAGAVI
Ph No: 08288-234601/286237 Fax: 08288-287299
E-mail: sainikschool@gmail.com Website: www.kittursainikschool.org

WANTED

(a) **Mess Manager:** Graduate in Home Science / Diploma in Hotel Management & Catering Technology, Experience in Management of Mess in Residential School will be preferred. Retired Defence JCO (Preferably from ASC) with experience of handling Mess may also apply.

(b) **Lower Division Clerk:** B.Com with minimum 5 years experience.
Desirable: Good knowledge of handling Tally (Version 9.0) ERP English and Kannada Typing with Diploma essential.
Salary will be fixed based on qualifications and experience.
Perks: Food and single / family accommodation available.
Please apply with recent pass port size colour photograph and copies of relevant testimonials to **The Principal Kittur Rani Channamma Residential Sainik School for Girls, Kittur-591115 Dist: Belagavi, Karnataka**
Last date for receipt of applications 31.05.2021.

Date: 20.05.2021 Sd/- Principal

SBI
STATE BANK OF INDIA
RACPC, Lalbagh Road
#73, 1st Floor, Lalbagh Main Road, Sudhamanagar, Bengaluru – 560 027.
Tel No: 080-22114022 E.Mail:sbi.40690@sbi.co.in

POSSESSION NOTICE
Under Rule - 8 (1) (For immovable property)

A/c.No.: HTL 37937412305. 64058195304.

WHEREAS, The undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the State Bank of India, under the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, issued a Demand Notice dated **16.12.2020** calling upon the borrower: **Smt. Parvathamma,** W/O Jayaramappa, to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being **Rs. 22,71,264.00** (Rupees Twenty Two Lakh Seventy one Thousand Two Hundred and Sixty Four Only) as on 15.12.2020. and interest & expenses thereon, within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice.

The borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under section 13 (4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 on this the **18th day of May month of the year 2021.**

The borrower in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of State Bank of India, for an amount of **Rs.17,36,414.00** (Rupees Seventeen Lakh Thirty Six Thousand Four Hundred Fourteen only) as on 15.05.2021 and further interest from 16.05.2021 costs, etc., thereon.

The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets..

SCHEDULE "A" PROPERTY

All that piece and parcel of the property bearing no 27, Assessment no -1, Khatha no 28, presently bearing Khatha no 58, 58/36, situated at Konankunte village, Uttarhalli Hobli, Bangalore, South Taluk, measuring East to West 34 feet North to South 48 Feet and bound on the: East by: Govindappas Property, West by: Road,North by: Road, South by: Annapoornammas Property .

Vide Absolute Sale Deed dated 30.01.1992 registered in favour of Smt. Parvathamma, W/O Jayaramappa, *in Book No.1 under Document No. 147/2002-03 and CD No.85 at the Office of Sub Registrar Kengeri on 06.04.2002.*

Date: 18.05.2021 Sd/-
Place: Bangalore Authorised Officer
STATE BANK OF INDIA

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ಸರ್ಕಾರಿ ಉಪಕರಣಾಗಾರ ಮತ್ತು ತರಬೇತಿ ಕೇಂದ್ರ
(ಇಂಡೋ-ಡ್ಯಾನಿಷ್ ಜೋಡಣೆ)
ರಾಜಾಜಿನಗರ ಕೈಗಾರಿಕಾ ವಸಾಹತು, ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು-560 010
ದೂರವಾಣಿ : 080-23157189, ಫ್ಯಾಕ್ಸ್ : 080-23301683
ವೆಬ್‌ಸೈಟ್ : www.karanadu.karnataka.gov.in/gttc ಇ-ಮೇಲ್ : gttc.mcd@karnataka.gov.in

ಸಂ: ಜಿಟಿಟಿಐ/ಪ್ರಯೋಜನೆ/ಸಿವಿಲ್-ಎಲೆಕ್ಟ್ರಿಕಲ್/ವರ್ಕ್ಸ್/ಬಿಡಿ-105/2021-22 ದಿನಾಂಕ : 20-05-2021

ಅಲ್ಪಾವಧಿ ಇ-ಟೆಂಡರ್ ಪ್ರಕಟಣೆ

ಸರ್ಕಾರಿ ಉಪಕರಣಾಗಾರ ಮತ್ತು ತರಬೇತಿ ಕೇಂದ್ರವು ಈ ಕೆಳಕಂಡ ಕಾಮಗಾರಿಯ ಟೆಂಡರ್‌ನ್ನು ಇ-ಪ್ರೊಕ್ಯೂರ್‌ಮೆಂಟ್ ಮುಖಾಂತರ ಆಹ್ವಾನಿಸಲಾಗಿದೆ.

ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ	ಬಿಡಿ ನಂ.	ಕೇಂದ್ರ	ಕಾಮಗಾರಿ ವಿವರ
1	105	ನರಗುಂದ	ವರ್ಕ್‌ಶಾಪ್ ಕಟ್ಟಡ ಮತ್ತು ಅಭಿವೃದ್ಧಿ ಕಾಮಗಾರಿ

ಟೆಂಡರ್ ದಾಖಲಾತಿಗಳನ್ನು ಇ-ಪೋರ್ಟಲ್‌ನಲ್ಲಿ ಸಲ್ಲಿಸಲು (Upload) ಕೊನೆಯ ದಿನಾಂಕ : **25-06-2021 ಸಂಜೆ 4.00** ಗಂಟೆಯವರೆಗೆ. ಹೆಚ್ಚಿನ ವಿವರಗಳಿಗಾಗಿ ಇ-ಪ್ರೊಕ್ಯೂರ್‌ಮೆಂಟ್ ಪೋರ್ಟಲ್ https://www.eproc.karnataka.gov.in ಮೂಲಕ ಪಡೆಯುವುದು ಅಥವಾ ಸಹಾಯಕ ದೂರವಾಣಿ ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ +918023010900, +918023010901 ಕಛೇರಿ ವೇಳೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಮಾಹಿತಿ ಪಡೆಯಬಹುದಾಗಿದೆ.

ಪಾ.ಸಂ.ಇ/ಟೆಂ.ನಗರ/RO. No. 409/2021-22

ಸಹಿ/-
ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥಾಪಕ ನಿರ್ದೇಶಕರು

ಕೋವಿಡ್-19 ಆತಂಕ ಬೇಡ: ಮುನ್ನೆಚ್ಚರಿಕೆ ಇರಲಿ

Government of India
Ministry of Agriculture & Farmers Welfare
(Department of Agriculture Cooperation & Farmers Welfare)
Southern Region Farm Machinery Training and Testing Institute
Tractor Nagar, Garladinne- 515 731, District: Anantapur (A.P.)
[An ISO 9001:2015 Certified Institute]
Phone: 08551 286441 E-mail: fmti-sr@nic.in

Advertisement No. SRFMTTI/01/2021
RECRUITMENT NOTICE

Applications are invited from eligible candidates for filling up of 01 (One) vacant post of "Multi Tasking Staff (Technical)" reserved for OBC category, Group 'C' (Non-Gazetted) (Non Ministerial) in Level -1 (Rs.18,000-56,900) in the pay matrix through Direct Recruitment basis at Farm Machinery Training & Testing Institutes (FMT&TIs), Subordinate offices of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare, Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare. Complete details of Vacancy Circular, Application Format, eligibility criterion and terms & conditions are available on the FMT&TIs' websites:**www.fmttibudni.gov.in**, **www.nrfmtti.gov.in**, **www.srfmtti.dacnet.nic.in**, **www.nerfmtti.nic.in**, and Department of Agriculture, Cooperation and Farmers Welfare website: **agricoop.nic.in**.

Last Date of Submission of Applications is on or before 05th July, 2021.

Educational and Other Qualifications required: i) Industrial Training Institute (ITI) Certificate in Tractor Mechanic or Farm Mechanic or Diesel Mechanic; and **(ii)** Possessing valid driving licence for tractor.

(Dr. P.P.Rao)
DIRECTOR

Government of India
Department of Atomic Energy
Bhabha Atomic Research Centre
Plant Operation and Maintenance Division

Post Bag no.1.Yelwal, Mysore - 571130
Telephone:**0821-2406566/6534** Fax:**0821-2403064**

NOTICE INVITING e- TENDER

Chief Engineer, BARC, Mysuru invites for & on behalf of the President of India, sealed item rate tenders from experienced contractors with sound financial & technical capacity for following work(s).

Tender Reference No.	**BARC/MYS/PO&M/NRK/SS, Monel piping/2021-23**
Name of work	Fabrication of Stainless Steel, Monel piping & related MS structural support including erection & testing works in process facilities, at BARC site, Mysuru.
Estimated Cost	**₹ 75,00,000 /-** (Rupees Seventy-Five Lakhs only)
Period of Completion	**18 (Eighteen) Months**
Earnest Money Deposit	NIL, Bid Security declaration may be please be provided as per format enclosed. If declaration not submitted tender will liable to be rejected.
Sale of Tender Documents	From **24.05.2021 (11:00 Hrs.)** to **08.06.2021 (15:00 Hrs.)**

Interested tenderers may please refer detailed Notice Inviting Tender (NIT) for eligibility criteria and other details, which can be downloaded from web site **www.tenderwizard.com/dae** or **www.tenderwizard.in/dae** and **www.barc.gov.in**

Chief Engineer, BARC
For & on behalf of President of India

KRISHNA BHAGYA JALA NIGAM LIMITED
(A Government of Karnataka Undertaking)
Office of the Executive Engineer, KBJNL, ALBC Division, Almatti, Tq: Basavan Bagewadi, Dist: Vijayapur. Phone No: 08426-281044

No: KBJNL/ALBC-Dn/DM/TND/Tailing-off & others/2021-22/207 Dated: 18.05.2021

SHORT TERM TENDER NOTIFICATION
(Through E-Procurement Only)

On behalf of the Managing Director, KBJNL, Bangalore, the Executive Engineer KBJNL, ALBC Division Almatti the under undersigned invites tender on **percenrage rate tender** in Two cover system from **KPWD Class-I & above registered contractors. Total No of works-03.** Approx amount put to tender: **Rs. 184.25 lakhs**.

The contractor can have access and submission of completed e-tender document of from **24.05.2021 to 09.06.2021** up to 5.00 pm. The Cover–I (Technical bid) will be opened in the under signed office on **11.06.2021** at 11.00 AM. The Cover–II (Financial bid) of qualified bidder will be opened in the under signed office on **16.06.2021** at 11.00 AM.

Further information about electronic tendering can be had from http://eproc.karnataka.gov.in/eportal/ines.seam and www.kbjnl.karnataka.gov.in and can be had from the undersigned during office hours.

Sd/- Executive Engineer, KBJNL, ALBC Division, Almatti.

ಪಾ.ಸಂ.ಇ/ವಿಜಯಪುರ/78/2021-22

ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ರಾಜ್ಯ ಸಹಕಾರ ಮಾರಾಟ ಮಹಾಮಂಡಳ ನಿಯಮಿತ
ನಂ: 8 ಕನ್ನಿಂಗ್‌ಹ್ಯಾಮ್ ರಸ್ತೆ, ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು - 52
ಫೋನ್: 22255091, ಫ್ಯಾಕ್ಸ್ 22265096

ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ: ಕೆ.ಎಸ್.ಸಿ.ಎಂ.ಎಫ್/ಟೆಂಡರ್/65/2021-22 ದಿನಾಂಕ: 22.05.2021

ಸಂಕ್ಷಿಪ್ತ ಟೆಂಡರ್ ಪ್ರಕಟಣೆ

ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ರಾಜ್ಯ ಸಹಕಾರ ಮಾರಾಟ ಮಹಾಮಂಡಳ ನಿಯಮಿತ, ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು ರವರು ಆಸಕ್ತಿಯುಳ್ಳ ಅರ್ಹ ತಯಾರಿಕರು/ಸರಬರಾಜುದಾರರಿಂದ ಈ ಕೆಳಕಂಡ ಸಾಮಗ್ರಿಗಳಾ ಸರಬರಾಜಿಗೆ ಇ-ಪ್ರೋಕ್ಯೂರ್‌ಮೆಂಟ್ ಮೂಲಕ ಟೆಂಡರ್‌ಗಳನ್ನು ಆಹ್ವಾನಿಸಲಾಗಿದೆ. ಆಸಕ್ತ ಟೆಂಡರ್‌ದಾರರು, ಪ್ರತ್ಯೇಕವಾಗಿ / ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಯಿಂದ / ಫರ್ಮ್ ಮತಿಯಿಂದ ಬಿಡ್ ಸಲ್ಲಿಸಬಹುದಾಗಿರುತ್ತದೆ.

ಟೆಂಡರ್‌ದಾರರು ತಮ್ಮ ಬಿಡ್‌ಗಳನ್ನು ದ್ವಿ-ಲಕೋಟಿ ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಸಲ್ಲಿಸಲು ಹಾಗೂ ಇ.ಎಂ.ಡಿ ಮೊತ್ತವನ್ನು ಇ-ನಗದಿನಲ್ಲಿ ಸಲ್ಲಿಸಬೇಕಾಗಿರುತ್ತದೆ. ಸದರಿ ಟೆಂಡರ್ ಇ-ಪ್ರೊಕ್ಯೂರ್‌ಮೆಂಟ್ ಪೋರ್ಟಲ್ ಮೂಲಕವಾಗಿರುತ್ತದೆ. ಖಾಲಿ ಟೆಂಡರ್ ದಾಖಲೆಗಳನ್ನು www.eproc.karnataka.gov.in ವೆಬ್‌ಸೈಟ್‌ನ ಮೂಲಕ ಪಡೆಯಬಹುದಾಗಿರುತ್ತದೆ.

ಕ್ರ. ಸಂ	ವಿವರ	ಪರಿಮಾಣ	ಟೆಂಡರ್ ಮೊತ್ತ
01	Supply of Dust free Cleaned Masoori Raw Rice – Bold in Printed Polythene bag to the above said office address. (each bag contain 5kg of Rice)	1,00,000 Bags	1,50,00,000.00

ಟೆಂಡರ್‌ಗೆ ನಿಗಧಿಪಡಿಸಿದ ದಿನಾಂಕಗಳು ಕೆಳಕಂಡಂತಿರುತ್ತದೆ.

1	ಇ-ಟೆಂಡರ್ ದಾಖಲೆಗಳು ಲಭಿಸುವ ದಿನಾಂಕ ಮತ್ತು ಸಮಯ	23-05-2021 ರಿಂದ 29-05-2021ರ ಅಪರಾಹ್ನ 04.00 ಘಂಟೆಯವರೆಗೆ
2	ಪ್ರೀ-ಬಿಡ್ ಮೀಟಿಂಗ್ ಮತ್ತು ಟೆಂಡರ್ ಬಗ್ಗೆ ಸ್ಪಷ್ಟನೆ ದಿನಾಂಕ ಮತ್ತು ಸಮಯ	26-05-2021 ಬೆಳಿಗ್ಗೆ 11.00 ಘಂಟೆಗೆ
3	ಟೆಂಡರ್ ಸಲ್ಲಿಸುವ/ನಮೂದಿಸುವ ಕೊನೆಯ ದಿನಾಂಕ ಮತ್ತು ಸಮಯ	29-05-2021ರ ಅಪರಾಹ್ನ 04.00 ಘಂಟೆಯವರೆಗೆ
4	ತಾಂತ್ರಿಕ ಬಿಡ್‌ಗಳನ್ನು ತೆರೆಯುವ ದಿನಾಂಕ	31-05-2021
5	ಆರ್ಥಿಕ ಬಿಡ್‌ಗಳನ್ನು ತೆರೆಯುವ ದಿನಾಂಕ	01-06-2021

ಸಹಿ/-
ವ್ಯವಸ್ಥಾಪಕ ನಿರ್ದೇಶಕರು

QuoteExpress
IF YOU'RE GOING THROUGH HELL, KEEP GOING > WINSTON CHURCHILL

THE NEW SUNDAY EXPRESS

COVID-19

TRACKING COVID-19

SPEED AND RISE OF COVID-19 CASES IN KARNATAKA

31,183 CASES REPORTED TODAY

32,218 CASES REPORTED YESTERDAY

TALLY STANDS AT

TODAY 23,98,925

YESTERDAY 23,67,742

DEATHS

TODAY	YESTERDAY
451	353

DISCHARGES

TODAY	YESTERDAY
61,766	52,581

ACTIVE CASES

TODAY	YESTERDAY
4,83,204	5,14,238

POSITIVITY RATE
TODAY 8.39%
YESTERDAY 8.32%

MORTALITY RATE
TODAY 1.02%
YESTERDAY 1.02%

RECOVERY RATE
TODAY 78.82%
YESTERDAY 77.25%

The first Covid-19 case in Karnataka was reported on March 8, 2020. Since then until May 22, 2021, a total 23,98,925 cases have been reported in 1 year and 72 days...

1,20,08,005 Total doses administered in state

VACCINATION DRIVE STATUS

Number of people completing vaccination	26,15,045
Health care workers 1st dose	7,06,122
Health care workers 2nd dose	4,65,740
Frontline workers 1st dose	5,39,083
Frontline workers 2nd dose	2,01,477
Age 18-45 1st dose	1,71,989
Above 45 1st dose	79,75,766
Above 45 2nd dose	19,47,828

DISTRICT-WISE COVID CASES

LAST 24 HOURS

8,214 BENGALURU URBAN

716 BENGALURU RURAL

Bagalakot: 285	Chamarajanagar: 412	Dakshina Kannada: 913	Hassan: 1,641	Kolar: 708	Raichur: 584	Udupi: 849
Ballari: 2,157	Chikkballapura: 720	Davanagere: 478	Haveri: 342	Koppal: 377	Ramanagara: 335	Uttara Kannada: 1,357
Belagavi: 1,026	Chikkamagaluru: 652	Dharwad: 973	Kalaburagi: 277	Mandya: 798	Shivamogga: 971	Vijayapura: 437
Bidar: 58	Chitradurga: 722	Gadag: 443	Kodagu: 345	Mysuru: 2,526	Tumakuru: 1,545	Yadgir: 322

SUNDAY INTERVIEW

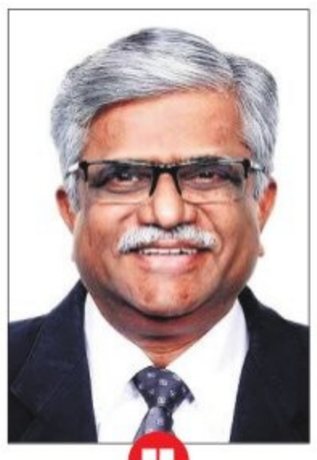
'Expect some stabilisation in Covid cases by June-end'

RAMU PATIL

WITH a high Covid-19 test positivity rate and an alarming rise in deaths, the situation in Karnataka remains grim. State Covid Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) Chairman Dr MK Sudarshan, however, expects some stabilisation by the end of June. He attributes the high positivity rate to more focused testing. Excerpts.

What is your assessment of the current situation?
The situation is improving. If the second phase of the lockdown is implemented strictly, it will result in a good scenario by the end of June. We expect the test positivity rate to come down significantly and some stabilisation by June-end. The high test positivity rate is because of focused and targeted testing, as by and large, symptomatic, primary and household contacts are being tested now. If you do random tests, the denominator will be large and the positivity rate will be less. It is now the beginning of flattening (of the curve) because of the lockdown. More effective the lockdown, more useful it will be in containing the pandemic.

Are we conducting enough tests now?
The lockdown is in force now and people are at home. We cannot expect the same number of tests done during normal times. More focused testing is being done now. As per the Government of India guidelines, up to 30 per cent of the total can be Rapid Antigen Tests (RAT). We must do more RAT for symptomatic individuals and once they turn positive, they can be immediately put in home isolation, in Covid Care Centres (CCCs) or depending on their clinical condition at hospitals. Immediate isolation and correct treatment are possible. The CCCs have been opened in rural areas as people may not have facilities for home isolation. Lack of home isolation facilities results in spreading the infection to other family members and other villagers, as it has happened in many places. As a policy, home isolation is not allowed in villages and urban slums. That will help prevent the spread of infection in villages and urban slums.



The effect of the 14-day lockdown has been fairly good. It has shown some decline in numbers in cases and test positivity rate

Dr MK Sudarshan, Chairman, State Covid-19 Technical Advisory Committee

Do you think the lockdown actually helped?
The effect of the 14-day lockdown has been fairly good. It has shown some decline in numbers in cases and test positivity rate.

The positivity rate has reduced to some extent compared to what it was before the 14-day lockdown, but it still remains high, and the number of deaths increased significantly. Why?
Deaths are still not coming down to the desired levels, because it is a cumulative effect. Whether it is a system or personal failure, delayed hospitalisation impacts recovery. People stay under home isolation and go to hospital late or find a bed late. It is very complex and multiple factors are involved. We hope it will come down in the second phase of the lockdown. Now, the rush for beds has reduced and beds are available quickly. Early and timely hospitalisation will happen and deaths are expected to come down.

How are we preparing for the third wave?
A separate committee has been announced under the leadership of Dr Devi Shetty and they are expected to guide the government on preparing for and managing the third wave.

There is a concern that it will impact children more...
That is a logical explanation given, as the vaccination is taking place for only 18 years and above. They appear vulnerable as they are not vaccinated and schools and colleges are expected to reopen.

Don't you think the progress of the vaccination drive is too slow? Will it be possible to cover the target group before the third wave?
The issue is vaccine availability. The government is fully ready to vaccinate people, but it has to get the vaccine.
It is trying its best. Global tenders have been floated, procurement orders and payments have been made to Indian companies.

Isn't vaccine shortage a major concern as we are in the middle of a raging pandemic?
Yes, it is a serious concern and the government is doing its best to get the vaccine.

There is apprehension over the increase in black fungus cases. Are we equipped to deal with it?
There is no need to panic. It is a new phenomenon in the second wave, and it is preventable and treatable. All necessary measures are being taken, including procurement of medicines. In due course of time, the incidence of black fungus will come down. We are well equipped to handle it.

IN PANDEMIC CHAOS, PATIENTS, DOCS NEED TO WORK TOGETHER

In the absence of any specific treatment for Covid-19 with clear evidence, a disciplined approach is the only way out of the grip of the disease

CHETANA BELAGERE @ Bengaluru

MUTATIONS in the SARS-CoV-2 and the surge in infections during the second wave have forced changes in treatment protocols that have not only caused confusion among the medical fraternity, but also caused side-effects and severe fungal infections among patients, leading to loss of lives.

More than 16 months since Covid-19 was first reported in Wuhan, China, a handful of vaccines and no proven treatment have led to the medical fraternity doing its optimal – even adding to its repository drugs like Remdesivir and Tocilizumab with no proven capability of curing the disease or reducing mortality.

The Indian Council for Medical Research (ICMR) recently updated its treatment protocol, dropping the much-hyped Convalescent Plasma Therapy. Amidst this chaos, the medical fraternity was faced with just one crucial question: How to treat Covid patients at home and in hospitals, and when to prescribe steroids, the misuse of which is known to be dreadful?

"Mutations are continuously occurring and variants are being seen bringing in more transmissibility and hence, increase in the number of cases. The ICMR has continued to treat with some medications that the WHO had recently advised against. But that is not dangerous if used judiciously and under the guidance of medical health professionals. It is based on vast experience and evidence of cure among Indian patients that these repurposed drugs are being used," pointed out Dr Manjunath C N, director of Sri Jayadeva Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences and Research.

The WHO norms have said there is no evidence of Remdesivir's impact on mortality, patient's need for mechanical ventilation, or any important outcome. However, there have been real-life Indian case studies showing that it reduced hospital stay, say experts.

Dr Nagaraja C, Director, Rajiv Gandhi Institute of Chest Diseases, says, "It is not a life-saving drug, but it has shown evidence of reducing the number of days a patient stays in the hospital. The patient recovers quickly and goes back home sooner. This helps as beds become available for other patients faster. So, definitely, this medicine does have its advantages. It is part of the national protocol, but only as an experimental and investigational therapy. It is not related to reducing mortality."

At present, none of the drugs being used in India for the treatment of Covid are new.

Dr Ravindra Mehta, renowned pulmonologist, Apollo Hospitals, says for Covid-19, 'right treatment for the right symptom at the right time' is the magic bullet. When there is no 'magic bullet' drug, he says a combination of drugs has worked. But, many cases have not been diagnosed at the right time, and patients have also been self-medicating out of the fear of having to get admitted in hospital, often resulting in worsening scenarios.

Dr Jayanthi CR, Dean, Bangalore Medical Research College & Institute, Victoria Hospital, says, "Different medicines have different effects on people. Doctor's advice is needed while taking medicines and Remdesivir and Ivermectin haven't been proven as the ultimate medicine against Covid. Also, some prescriptions doing the rounds say steroids can be started on day 5 and people are blindly doing that. People could not only have side-effects like black fungus, but also lose their lives."

In this scenario, the best approach is for patients to keep track of symptoms and follow the doctors' advice to follow a robust schedule at home or when admitted to hospital, if needed.

BIG PICTURE

ONE STEP AT A TIME

Dr Mathew Varghese, Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon, St Stephen's Hospital, Delhi, who is known as a 'warrior' against the Polio and whose video on Covid timeline and management of the virus went viral, started taking notes on every single patient, their relatives and primary contacts to understand how the disease was spreading. He noticed a pattern in the way the virus worked in each individual's body. During the 2nd wave, he managed patients with timely treatment, realising many did not need hospitalisation. According to him, the timing of the very first symptom is the most important to note. Dr Varghese explains the ideal treatment method in stages:

THE VERY FIRST STEP

Normally, people reveal significant symptoms like a fever or loss of taste and smell as their first day. But that's not the case. They would have had an itchy throat or a bodyache which they would have attributed to some other physical strain or change in weather. "The day the symptom was first experienced is Day 1 of the onset of disease in the patient," he says. The incubation period for SARS-CoV-2 is five days (+/- 2 days) for the onset of symptoms from the day of viral entry into the body.

DAY 1-3: This is the time when a patient is in the incubation phase and viremia shows symptoms in the body. That is when the patient is most infectious in transmitting the virus to others. This is also when the body begins to generate antibodies and fever sets in.

Treatment: If it's only fever, then take paracetamol and nothing else to be done about it. Do not take steroids at this time, as it can multiply the virus and worsen the disease. About 80 per cent of people get better by this time.

Warning signs: Watch out for these symptoms now — increase in fever, onset of settled fever, cough which is deep, but no phlegm, breathlessness. If symptoms persist, hospitalisation may be required.

Day 4-5: Crucial days, as it can take a dangerous turn. It is not because of the virus, but due to antibodies in your own body, which are supposed to kill the virus but attack your own cells. Reason: Some cells have proteins on their surface which mimic the virus' structure, especially the spike protein. This often happens in the lungs. The antibodies go and attack the lung's blood vessels and clotting occurs. This clogs blood vessels, which, in turn, obstructs the oxygen exchange and lung saturation dips. This causes problems in breathing. Pathology is not because of the virus but the body's reaction to the presence of the virus. It is not pneumonia, but clotting of blood veins which cause the problem. If you allow this to continue, then you will need to be given oxygen. A patient needs to anticipate this so that it can be treated.

Treatment: At this stage, the patients should not take paracetamol if one has fever, bodyache or/and, sore throat as it suppresses the symptoms and conceals Covid-19 taking a dangerous turn. It is now that steroids and anticoagulants are given together.

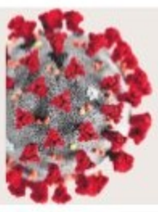
Days 5-6: The patient, at this stage, is put on steroids to prevent a cytokine storm. But only steroids will not stop it. It needs to be combined with anticoagulants. The combination prescription has to be started even before diagnosing clotting of the blood vessels. Patients should not do this on their own as steroids suppresses immunity, and therefore can be a double-edged sword as various infections take over. Diabetic patients in this situation need to be in touch with their doctors for further treatment.

Treatment: The anticoagulant should be taken for 3 weeks and the steroid for 10 days. Most patients have good outcomes. Monitoring oxygen levels with an oximeter at home is not the right thing to do as, by then, the lungs would already be damaged. And invariably it can lead to a catastrophe. The instrument is useful for doctors in hospitals, but do not sit at home with it.

Day 7: Patients feel better with steroids. Fever is gone. But in immuno-compromised patients, especially the elderly, they start getting fever on the 4th day of their steroid regimen. It isn't the virus which is coming back but immunity which is suppressed that allows the normal bacteria in the lungs to attack the body and cause bacterial infection/pneumonia. It is at this stage that the patient needs antibiotics. They should not be taken in the early stages, as it encourages antibiotic resistance. Doxycycline & azithromycin are useless in early stages.

SOME RELIEF

AT 61K, K'TAKA SEES RECORD DISCHARGES



BENGALURU: Karnataka on Saturday recorded its highest single-day Covid-19 discharges at 61,766. This brings the total number of discharges in the State to 18,91,042 since the beginning of the pandemic last year. With high discharges, the State's recovery rate has gone up from 77.25% on Friday to 78.82% on Saturday. Meaanwhile, the State reported 31,183 cases on Saturday with 451 deaths. The active cases too dropped from 5,14,238 to 4,83,204. ENS

Delay in appointing nodal officers hits vax drive

IFFATH FATHIMA @ Bengaluru

THE Health Department's decision to resume vaccination for the 18-44 age group belonging to certain frontline workers and priority groups from Saturday failed to kick off here as the orders appointing nodal officers for the respective categories of beneficiaries were passed only by evening.

Health officials said that the district administration will be directed to nominate nodal officers for each category in order to decentralise the process. The nodal officers will be in charge of issuing eligibility certificates to those seeking vaccination. Among the frontline workers identified by the State Government are immediate family members of health care workers, teachers assigned to Covid-19 duties, one caretaker each for the specially-abled, cemetery/crematorium workers, government transport employees, autorickshaw and cab drivers, prisoners, employees of electricity and water boards and others.

Dr Vaishnavi, Nodal Officer (Special Officer Smart City), in charge of vaccination for street vendors, said, "On Saturday, we had a discussion on how to carry out the process. The orders appointing nodal officers came late in the evening. We have decided to set up camps to carry out the drive. This will take a day or two to streamline as more planning is required. For the unorganised sector, walk-in vaccination will be allowed."

Meanwhile, several organisations had no clue that the government had considered them as frontline workers to vaccinate them. "Ola and Uber drivers are not aware of this. The companies did not give them any eligibility certificate. Even MNC company drivers had no idea about vaccination," said Tanveer Pasha, president, Ola and Uber Drivers' and Owners' Association.

A 'Covaxin out of stock' board outside a vaccination centre in Bengaluru on Saturday | ASHISHKRISHNA HP

M Manjunath of Bangalore's Adarsha Taxi Union said that he got a call from the Mahalakshmi Layout MLA asking him to prepare a list of drivers to get vaccinated on Monday. "The elected representative personally called us and informed us that the ground near Modi Hospital will be used to vaccinate us," he said.

Meanwhile, a BBMP health official said, "Plans were being chalked out and that is why the delay. Micro-planning is being done and we will start the drive for this category soon."

The State received 2,04,050 doses of Covishield on Saturday. The state has so far received 1,01,60,060 and 13,54,050 doses of Covishield from GoI and state procurement, respectively. In total, the state has received 1,28,24,560 doses, including 13,10,450 doses of Covaxin.

Private hospital in Bengaluru 'wasted' oxygen amid shortage, finds report

BOSKY KHANNA @ Bengaluru

AT a time when every ounce of oxygen is precious, a report by the Health Department, nodal officers in charge of oxygen supply and Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) shows that a private hospital in Bengaluru "wasted" this precious commodity.

According to the report, a copy of which is available with *TNSE*, on May 1, Sapthagiri Institute of Medical Sciences and Research Centre demanded 5kl of oxygen multiple times, which, according to Health Department officials, is very high for a hospital with 201 HDU and 10 ICU beds. Within a couple of days, the institute again demanded 12kl of oxygen.

The BBMP and the Health Department grew suspicious and a team was sent to physically examine the status. The team calculated the need for oxygen based on fixed daily requirement, on the number of beds and average consumption. The team did a physical head count and found the number of patients admitted were much less than what was quoted.

According to the report, "The hospital demanded 4.30 kl oxygen quoting information on Suvarna Arogya Suraksha Trust (SAST) portal. The actual consumption for a period of 24 hours is 3.34kl. Based on information given by Dr Giri, an intensivist at the hospital, 4.12 kl is needed. However, based on physical count done by BBMP, the hospital will need 1.84 kl."

"Leakage in oxygen pipes were found. Poor maintenance and ice formation on evaporation coil impacted vaporisation and flow capacity. So every minute, 3.341 kl of oxygen was being wasted," said an official who inspected the site.

The reports, signed by nodal officers for oxygen supply, BBMP Dasarahalli zone officials and officials from Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute, showed gross anomalies. The reports have been submitted to the government. The reports states that criminal action should be initiated against the hospital for showing more patients on record against physical count, for not admitting patients referred by BBMP and for wasting oxygen.

BBMP and Medical Education Department officials said that they had asked for a report from the institute, but in vain. "The oxygen lines are not maintained well. So, it has been decided to reduce their bed permit to 50 from 211 before closing down the OPD. The hospital is still getting 4.7-5.5kl of oxygen as against the demand of 6kl. The government has still not taken any action against the institute," an official said.

Despite repeated attempts by *TNSE* to reach out to the hospital authorities and to Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar, there was no response from both.

Govindapura police in Bengaluru have cracked a four-year-old murder and robbery case by arresting a gang of four men who had killed the driver of an ATM vehicle and robbed Rs 75 lakh in cash. The incident was reported in November 2018.

Low pressure forms, Odisha braces for 'Yaas'

Tropical storm may cross coast around north Odisha, West Bengal by May 26

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ BHUBANESWAR

ODISHA is bracing for a mid-pandemic natural disaster as a low pressure formed over east-central Bay of Bengal on Saturday morning is likely to grow into a very severe cyclonic storm 'Yaas' over the next four days.

Preliminary forecast says, the tropical storm may cross the coast around north Odisha, West Bengal and Bangladesh by May 26 evening.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) said the low pressure will concentrate into a depression by Sunday morning, move north-northwestwards and intensify into a cyclonic storm by Monday. Over the subsequent 24 hours, it would gain strength into a very severe cyclonic storm.

The storm will continue to move north-northwestwards and reach north Bay of Bengal near West Bengal, adjoining north Odisha and Bangladesh coasts around Wednesday morning. The path of the system can be ascertained after it intensifies into a depression, Director Bhubaneswar Meteorological Centre HR Biswas said. Private weather forecaster Skymet said, cyclone Tauktae, which formed over Arabian Sea, had a long sea travel and therefore intensified into an extremely severe cyclonic storm.

"The tropical storm over Bay of Bengal will barely have 500 km to 600 km of ocean stretch before the coastline. The storm is expected to move north-west towards West Bengal and north Odisha coast and will make landfall on May 26 morning," it added.

According to Joint Typhoon Warning Center (JTWC), global models are in good agreement that the system will continue to track northward and intensify steadily. The potential for the development of a significant tropical cyclone within the next 24 hours has been upgraded to medium, the agency predicted.

ALL IN VAIN

A farmer looks at his red spinach crop that was destroyed at Kakkamoola, Thiruvananthapuram, following heavy rain and wind due to the low pressure formed in the Bay of Bengal region on Saturday | VINCENT PULICKAL

Satheesan to lead UDF as CPM subtly sets Cong agenda too

CYNTHIA CHANDRAN @ T'PURAM

V D Satheesan, the 56-year old fifth term legislator from Paravoor, will be the new opposition leader of the state.

Satheesan's appointment as Congress Legislature Party leader was confirmed by the Congress high command on Saturday after AICC former president Rahul Gandhi MP and AICC general secretary K C Venugopal decided to ignore pressure tactics employed by dominant groups led by Oommen Chandy and Ramesh Chennithala and go by the sentiments of majority of active workers and youth leaders. The congress leadership also took into account the change of political environment in the state triggered by the revolutionary steps taken by the CPM and CPI to replace

an entire generation of political leaders with fresh faces.

It is learnt that numerous e-mails received by the high command from the youth leaders in Kerala highlighted how the CPM had successfully engineered a generational shift and how the party would find it tough to take on the vigorous new leadership of the CPM in the grassroots. The decision on the Congress Legislature Party leader was conveyed by Mallikarjun Kharge, the central observer who was assigned to oversee the CLP leader selection, to State Congress president Mullapally Ramachandran who subsequently announced the decision.

Newly-elected Opposition leader V D Satheesan speaks to media on Saturday

When the first session of the 15th Kerala Legislative Assembly session starts on Monday, Mullapally will give the letter to pro-tem Speaker, P T A Rahim, informing him of the Congress party's decision on the CLP leader.It is learnt that Satheesan's appointment is only a beginning and the Congress high command will appoint new leaders to other key posts and revamp all organisational committees so that the UDF can perform well in the 2024 LS election.

People throng the Kothavalchavadi Market in Chennai to buy essential items as the government relaxed the rules prior to the complete lockdown from Monday | ASHWIN PRASATH

TN to go under stricter lockdown for a week from tomorrow

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Chennai

THE Tamil Nadu government has decided to intensify the lockdown measures for a week, starting Monday.

During the period, even grocery and vegetable shops will not be allowed to function. To help the public prepare for the intensive lockdown, the government allowed all shops to function on Saturday and Sunday till 9 pm.

An announcement in this regard was made by Chief Minister MK Stalin on Saturday afternoon. Private and government bus services have also been permitted to ply on Saturday and Sunday, for the convenience of those wishing to return to their native districts ahead of the new measures. Further, the State Horticulture Department has been tasked to supply vegetables to people across the State during the lockdown week. Various sections of the public have already raised apprehensions on whether the department has sufficient infrastructure to deliver supplies to every nook and corner of the State.

This issue is likely to figure in the Chief Minister's meeting with District Collectors on Sunday. Banks can function with one third of total staff while employees of private enterprises, insurance companies, and Information Technology have been requested to work from home. ATM and related services, however, will remain open. The decisions were taken based on suggestions of a committee of health experts, and representatives of various legislative parties.

More oxygen sought

The CM said, "Since there has been a delay in procuring oxygen from Odisha, I have requested Union Minister Piyush Goyal to allocate 900 metric tonnes of oxygen to Tamil Nadu in addition to the regular supply and he has agreed to this."

COVID-FREE VILLAGE MODEL TO BE REPLICATED

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Mysuru

EXPRESS IMPACT

After *The New Indian Express* reported about two villages — Katur and Ucchagani — that have managed to keep Covid at bay by reporting zero cases since the outbreak, the Mysuru district administration visited the villages and announced that they would replicate the 'model' across others village to fight the Covid pandemic.

Deputy Commissioner Rohini Sindhuri, Mysuru Superintendent of Police C B Ryshyanth and other health officials visited these villages in Nanjangud taluk, expressing their happiness at the way they emerged as model villages, thanks to the efforts of the villagers.

Praising these villages, District in-charge Minister S T Somashekhar said that their efforts would be replicated in the district. He said that he would visit the villages in the coming week to study the 'model' firsthand. He said though there was an increase in the number of cases in Nanjangud, the number of recoveries was high as well. However, people needed to be aware of Covid.

He added that Legislators, district officials and tahsildars have already held meetings in connection with the construction of an oxygen plant under the CSR funds on the premises of a primary healthcare centre in Nanjangud.

Having followed Covid-appropriate behaviour and other regulations imposed by the village heads, Kaatur and Ucchagani, with a total population of about 2,000 people, have not reported a single Covid case during the first and second waves.

The DC said that the model will be studied and implemented in other villages.

CRIME PATROL

2 more held in B'luru for selling O_2 cylinders in black

Bengaluru: CCB sleuths on Saturday arrested two more people on charges of selling oxygen cylinders in black. Acting on a tip-off, the sleuths raided the house of one Shivaganesh (49), a resident of Seshadripuram and arrested him. The police recovered four oxygen cylinders from Shivaganesh, who sought Rs 10,000 for each cylinder from those who needed it. Based on the information provided by Shivaganesh, police arrested his associate, Bharath (35), a gas agency employee, from Byatarayanapura. According to the police, Bharath used to source the cylinders for Shivaganesh and the duo would share the profit. Police recovered two jumbo oxygen cylinders from Bharath.

All benches should hear cases through virtual mode, says K'taka High Court

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE Karnataka High Court issued fresh Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the principal bench at Bengaluru, and the benches at Dharwad and Kalaburagi, with effect from May 24, 2021, as the courts are reopening on Monday after summer vacation, in view of the lockdown.

According to the SOP issued by Registrar General T G Shivashankare Gowda (In-charge), all benches should hear cases only via virtual mode. However, the Advocate General, Additional Advocate General, State Government Advocate and Prosecutors, may, if necessary, address the courts being physically present, while the cases can be filed physically or through e-filing.

With regard to the principal bench, the advocates, parties-in-persons and litigants are not allowed to enter the court complex, unless there is a specific court order to that effect, and unless a soft or hard copy of that order is shown to security personnel at Gate No.5.

Only for the purpose of rectification of office objections, entry of advocates and parties-in-person will be allowed on the first floor of the food court complex. In such case, the advocate shall not be accompanied by more than one advocate colleague and an authorised clerk in person.

Every person entering the premises, including advocates and staff, should mandatorily wear a proper face mask, and the staff should use hand gloves and sanitiser.

Every person entering the court precincts shall be scanned at the entry point with thermal scanners. Similar SOP will be applicable for the benches at Dharwad and Kalaburagi.

SOP for district and trial courts

The Registrar General also issued SOP for the district and trial courts with effect from Monday. They are requested to file cases through e-filing as far as possible. However, an adequate number of counters will be opened outside the main court building for physical filing, and advocates have been asked to follow protocol while doing so. Entry of litigants, parties-in-person, and advocates to the court complexes is prohibited, except for police officers and the accused for the purpose of remand.

Leopardess, 2 cubs found dead in Mysuru

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Mysuru

'WE'RE part of the solution' reads the theme for this year's International Day for Biological Diversity observed on May 22. Ironically, Mysuru reported deaths of three leopards in an alleged case of deliberate poisoning on its outskirts with sources pointing fingers at handiwork of some villagers.

The day also saw death of an eight-year-old tigress at Hediyala sub division in Nugu range of the Bandipur Tiger Reserve but forest department officials maintain that the death was likely caused by territorial fight since the tigress had injuries resembling that of a territorial fight.

Meanwhile, carcasses of three leopards, including a leopardess aged 4-5 years along with male and female leopards aged approximately 8-10 months were found near Belavadi Lake on Mysuru outskirts on Saturday.

Forest officials also found a half-eaten street dog laced with poisonous matter. During the autopsy, traces of dog meat were found in the abdomen of the leopards.

Three days ago, five leopards including a leopardess and its offsprings, were sighted on BEML campus in Koorgalli near Belavadi. However, forest officials are yet to confirm whether the carcasses discovered on Saturday are the same big cats. Sources suspect it to be the handiwork of those residing in the neighbourhood.

Meanwhile, Mysuru territorial Deputy Conservator of Forests Dr K C Prashanth Kumar said investigation is underway. He said samples from carcass of leopard and stray dog have been sent to Institute of Animal Health and Veterinary Biologicals in Bengaluru and to the FSL lab in Mysuru. "We will be monitoring the BEML premises to ascertain whether they are the same leopards," he added.

EXPRESS READ

2 labourers die in wall collapse

Bengaluru: Two labourers were buried alive while another was injured after a mud wall collapsed on them at a construction site in Devarabeesanahalli on Saturday. The Marathahalli police and Fire and Emergency Services personnel rushed to the spot and extricated the bodies. The deceased are Jambanna (45), a native of Koppal, and Bheemaraya (34) from Kalaburagi. The injured Veeranna B has been hospitalised and his condition is stable. Police said the incident occurred when six labourers were digging in the basement of the site. A case has been registered against the site engineer and contractor. No safety measures were taken at the site.

Not even first dose of Covaxin available for now

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

ON Saturday, the NHM director stated that the clarification is being issued as there was "some confusion among the public" on the vaccination process. It also listed who will get the vaccine.

The first dose of Covishield for those above 45 years of age is available "online in urban areas and on-site in rural areas", while those due for their second dose of Covishield can walk into the nearest vaccination centre.

But the first dose of Covaxin is "currently not available" and those waiting for their second dose will be informed through SMS, it stated.

Karnataka Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar said that the state received 2,04,050 doses of Covishield on Saturday based on the order placed directly to the manufacturers. "So far state has received 1,01,60,060 & 13,54,050 doses of Covishield from GoI & state procurement respectively. In total we have received 1,28,24,560 doses incl 13,10,450 doses of Covaxin," he tweeted.

A health worker vaccinates a woman at KC General government hospital in Bengaluru on Saturday | ASHISHKRISHNA HP

VACCINATION FOR ABOVE 45 YEARS

Covishield
1st dose: Online in urban areas and onsite in rural areas.
2nd dose: Walk in to nearest Covid vaccination centre.

Covaxin
1st dose: currently not available
2nd dose: SMS will be sent to beneficiaries due for 2nd dose.

For 18-44 years
Currently not available Identified frontline workers, vulnerable groups and priority members will be informed of date and time of vaccination by designated nodal officers.

Educated folks too getting minors married: CWC

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

THE CWC chairperson said that while a majority of child marriages turn out to be of minor girls eloping with their boyfriends and getting married to them fearing parental and family opposition, there are cases where educated and well-to-do families have got their minor daughters married. "A student of Class 10 in an international school in the City was married to her mother's relative. The parents were arrested," she said.

In yet another bizarre incident, the mother of a 15-and-half-year-old girl along with the mother of an adult man, who is working in Dubai, got the minor 'married' virtually! "The girl's mother tied the thali to her daughter, while the boy's mother made a video call to her son and announced their marriage," she said.

Ramanna said that very often, parents from socially and economically weaker sections are unaware of the law and get their daughters, who are a few months short of turning 18, married.

"We have also received some cases in which the minor girls called 1098 – the child helpline – to register complaints against their parents, who were forcing them to marry," she added.

'Need to remain calm to fight Covid'

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

BUT as the couple's symptoms got worse and their oxygen levels started dipping, they were informed that they had Covid and had to be admitted to hospital.

Alice Pinto

Harish S Bandagar, grandson of the couple, said, "Their oxygen saturation level had dropped below 75. It was scary because of their age. We could not get oxygen beds for two days. However, through some volunteers, we got the beds at Bowring Hospital. When we went there, we saw five Covid deaths. I was scared to get them admitted, but I had no choice. Now, they have come out as fighters."

Vasanth said, "When we got to know that we were Covid-positive it was scary as we are aged and did not know if we could fight this out. But my wife and I decided to take it positively. We took all the medication and treatment, and every day we hoped to recover. We kept thinking that we could fight Covid and we needed to be calm. The hospital staff were friendly and took great care of us. We were given steroids and we recovered. I feel much better now, while my wife needs oxygen for another week. She, too, seems to be doing well. With a good positive mindset, we can overcome diseases."

In the case of Alice Pinto, who tested Covid-positive last month, the doctors had declared that 60 per cent of her lungs had been infected. But with sheer dedication of the family, her positive attitude and support of doctors, she has recovered completely.

Her son Agnel Pinto, who also tested positive, said that his mother got infected in April and she recovered after 14 days. "For six days she had fever and we admitted her to Fr Muller's Hospital. We were initially worried as she has high sugar too. During her six-day stay at the hospital from April 15 to 21, she was on oxygen for just one hour. We kept observing her saturation levels."

Self actualization is the oxygen for the soul

Brian Johnson

MODI vs WHO: 'DON'T KNOW/ CAN'T SAY'

THE Modi Sarkar completes seven years in power next week. There is much lather and debate about the fall in the approval ratings of Prime Minister Narendra Modi — from 63 per cent to 38 per cent as per the weekly tracker of C Voter and from 68 per cent in May 2020 to 33 per cent as per a poll by the global outfit Morning Consult.

The findings are unsurprising given the magnitude of despair and distress witnessed. In their management of the second wave of the pandemic, governments (Centre and states) have assigned vaccination the role of sole saviour. And the management of vaccine procurement has left millions in a queue of want. Undoubtedly, the response reflects the grief and anger among the people across India.

It is rare for an opinion poll to produce a riveting perspective about India's political landscape through one multiple option question. And pollster Yashwant Deshmukh, through his poll which tracks 10,000 people, produced just that.

THE THIRD EYE

SHANKKAR AIYAR
Author of The Gated Republic, Aadhaar: A Biometric History of India's 12 Digit Revolution, and Accidental India
shankkar.aiyar@gmail.com

The C-Voter tracker asked, 'Who do you think is the most suitable candidate for the post of the Prime Minister of India?'. The granular detail of the responses is telling. The preference for Narendra Modi has slipped from 64 to 41 per cent. What is more significant is that the second choice of respondents, at around 18 per cent, is 'Don't know/ Can't Say'. A people disappointed and despondent are adrift in the quest for an elusive option for deliverance.

The sense of schadenfreude — that vicarious joy at another's misery — across opposition ranks though is misplaced. There is much speculation about the 'coming together' of opposition parties following the victory of the Trinamool Congress in Bengal. Well, Mamata Banerjee is at just over three per cent and the sum total of affiliation of all the candidates in the fray is lower than that of Modi. Rahul Gandhi at 11.6 per cent tops the chart of opposition leaders, and the others at best command single digit subscription.

The sum of pieces thesis doesn't quite add up — the stunning fact is that the ratios of those saying don't know/can't say has shot up from 8 to 18 per cent. Verily, the excitement in the ranks of the Congress and other parties can be characterised as wishful thinking. The buzz about a meaningful challenge to the BJP and Modi is ambition in the quest of affiliation, a plot in search of screenplay, or charitably speaking a narrative in search of evidence. There isn't an individual or a party close to be being characterised as a real challenger.

Earlier this week Rahul Gandhi, former Congress President who many suspect could be the future president, posted on Twitter a quote by the philosopher Karl Popper. "True ignorance is not the absence of knowledge; it's the refusal to acquire it." The taunt, ostensibly aimed at the ruling establishment, holds true for the Congress too.

Fact is the Congress too has refused to acquire knowledge -- the promise of introspection made in 2014 could soon acquire the tag of an archaeological dig. It is true that the Congress is a pan Indian entity — it secured 11.9 crore votes in 2019 even though it won only 52 seats. But it has struggled across polls and states given the state of its organisation. Much like rain-fed farms, the party sprouts a cadre only when irrigated by the precipitation of power. And without a visible leadership and organisation, it has been reduced to an idea.

The failures of a flailing opposition though are not a cause for celebration for the BJP. It is instructive to remember that the absence of a challenger or political entity did not detain the defeat of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government. What must worry the Sangh Parivar is that alongside the prime minister, there has been a sharp slide in the rating of Home Minister Amit Shah viewed, arguably, as a proxy for the ruling party of the country.

The decline in approval is coterminous with the arrival of the pandemic, and the top most concern of those polled are the management of the twin challenges of the economy and the pandemic. The poll shows the respondents are increasingly pessimistic both about their own life and the state of the country. The operative phrase delicately deployed by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat is 'complacent'. The choices and decisions, by design or default, have led to the destruction of political capital indispensable for catalysing change.

Critical for reclaiming popular approval is the approach to change. Much depends on how the vaccination rollout is redesigned and how the economy is revived. The plethora of cases across high courts on the management of the pandemic and on crucial policy matters reflect the inadequacies of talent in the government, of state capacity, the perpetuation of Babudom and of Committee Raj.

Albert Einstein observed that "No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it." Governance continues to be sluggish, antiquated in structure and systems and inefficient — much like the Ambassador cars, the symbol of officialdom for decades.

Modi arrived in 2014 with the promise of transformative change. The motto of minimum government, maximum governance awaits reclamation.

INDIA'S SELF-INFLICTED CATASTROPHE

POINT OF VIEW

TJS GEORGE

WHEN times are normal, the quality of leadership is not on trial; even an unimaginative head of a country, an organisation, a family can get by. The situation changes when a threat looms large. Covid created such a situation in India, and the record shows that it was handled in a manner no one can be proud of.

To a large extent, the situation was handled from a standpoint not of public good but of public relations. The result was that the people did not quite know what was happening and what were the consequences of what was happening. Our parliamentary system does not enable the opposition to ferret out facts which the ruling dispensation tries to hide. And our media is "cautious".

But observers from beyond our shores have been able to see what citizens could not. What they saw was not exactly encouraging. In fact, they were scary. Lancet, a highly respected and peer-reviewed medical weekly, commented: "Scenes of suffering in India are hard to comprehend." Referring to the authorities ignoring repeated warnings of the dangers of a second wave, it said the "Government seemed more intent on removing criticism on Twitter than trying to control the pandemic. Government policies changed abruptly and without explanation creating mass confusion."

Lancet, of course, had done its homework before coming out with its conclusions. Saying that governmental neglect was the main reason for the crisis going virtually out of control, the journal called it "a self-inflicted national catastrophe". It explained: "The Government squandered its early success in controlling Covid. Its task force did not meet for months." The journal faulted the Government for not "providing responsible leadership or transparency".

These are serious charges based on serious fact-checking. Indian media is unused to - and also ill-equipped - to carry out studies of this kind. If anyone tried, he would run into trouble. The Government pays no attention to public opinion as can be seen from its hurried destruction of New Delhi's Central Vista for the sole purpose of boosting the ego of individuals. This attitude of the Government could be a factor that makes foreign observers come out with dire predictions.

The Institute of Health Metrics, a global health research centre at the University of Washington, warned a few weeks ago that one million people could die in India by August because of Covid. Not one Indian would want to believe that. But the fact remains that, even if something like that were to happen, we wouldn't know. In other words, we wouldn't know until some study centre in Washington or London informs us.

Available information is discouraging. Rakesh Mishra of Covid-2 Genome Sequencing Consortium said experts had warned in early March that "there is a real danger" of a second wave. But the Government not only missed the point; health minister Harsh Vardhan

Our parliamentary system does not enable the opposition to ferret out facts which the ruling dispensation tries to hide. And our media is "cautious". But observers from beyond our shores have been able to see what citizens could not

publicly claimed that all was under control. In any case, the Government was busy with election politics in Bengal. The Prime Minister was focused on that, if his speeches of the time were anything to go by. Today, reports say, India accounts for half of the world's new infections.

Does that matter? The Central Government does not seem to think so. Its priority is very clear, if we take even a cursory look at photographs coming from Delhi. The majestic Rajpath going from Rashtrapati Bhavan to India Gate and on the National Stadium already has its side lawns dug up with earth movers. The Central Vista is being given a new Modi Vista look. Plans for things like a new Prime Minister's Residence will be pursued as high priority -- Covid or no Covid and whether or not hospitals have enough oxygen. (The PM's Residence, please note, will have 10 four-storey buildings.)

News agencies say that Delhi is under "complete lockdown". But the Modi Central Vista Project is going on as it has been termed "essential service". No wonder a Washington newspaper ran a story headlined: "Modi's pandemic choice: Protect his image or protect India. He chose himself." That explains why American surveys report Modi's approval ratings falling to a new low.

We are a nation with an eventful past. We have been ruled — and shaped? — by grand personalities, from Ashoka to Alauddin Khilji, from Aurangzeb to Akbar. India survived them all. That does not mean that India will survive whoever rules it. Aurangzeb did not have video call facilities. Nor did Akbar run a Jan-ki-baat programme. The game is different today. So are the players. These are days that put substance in the saying: Winner takes all.

WORK WITH STATES UNHINDERED BY EGO

POWER & POLITICS

PRABHU CHAWLA
prabhuchawla@newindianexpress.com
Follow him on Twitter @PrabhuChawla

INDIA'S power lies in diversity. The countless invasions and internecine wars over centuries coalesced cultural combinations to form our federal foundations. Calamity breeds insecurity and belligerence. India, once the world's richest nation with a 24.4 per cent share of the world economy in 1700, has been overtaken even by Bangladesh. The humiliation apart, the national atmosphere is degenerating into intolerant and pugnacious chaos.

Confrontation has replaced consensus. Genuine disagreement is taken as affront. From politics to entertainment, a new combative Indian has emerged. He is unwilling to yield an inch to any contrary narrative. Nothing else can explain the continuous bickering between the Centre and the states over India's disastrous Covid management. Going by statistics, every 12th Covid death is in India and every seventh citizen has been infected. Yet, the political class is squabbling over numerical notoriety and shifting the blame according to political affiliations.

The language and tone indicate that today's India resembles not a unified nation, but a confederation of the feudal fiefdoms of the 18th century. Our politicians fail to understand that Bengal's agony is not Assam's ecstasy. Rajasthan's prosperity isn't Haryana's tragedy. All states are inseparable vital organs of India's totality. If one fails, the others will fall sick sooner than later. Hence, sit and talk rather than shoot and scoot.

Crisis conferences between Prime Minister Modi and chief ministers are now battlefields for settling scores, and not forums to vapourise the virus. Last week, Mamata Banerjee targeted Modi after attending a meeting called by him to discuss Covid care. He had also invited a select group of District Magistrates and chief ministers for feedback from the ground. The CMs had expected to get feedback, too.

Mamata, after her party's stunning victory last month, was in no mood to stay a mute spectator. After the meeting, she lambasted the PM. "This was not a one-way communication... it was one-way humiliation... One nation, all humiliation. Is the Prime Minister so insecure that he didn't want to listen to the chief ministers? Why is he so scared? If he didn't want to hear the chief ministers why call us? He let some District Magistrates speak and insulted the Chief Ministers," she said.

Previously, Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren expressed similar sentiments after participating in a tele-meeting with Modi. He had said, "Today, the respected PM called. He only spoke his '*Mann Ki Baat*'. It would have been better if he would have talked business and listened to the issues." Arvind Kejriwal streamed his speech live which was deemed against protocol; Modi scolded him. Only Andhra CM Jagan Reddy pleaded for harmony and reconciliation. Justifiably, the BJP chief ministers stayed shtum out of loyalty or fear, ignoring the contagion's harvest of horror.

The time has come for genuine cooperative federalism with the Centre leading from the front and the states having their say in national affairs. Like the party in power at the Centre enjoys the mandate of the people, so do the regional parties. In fact, who other than Modi can understand a state's agony better, after facing 12 years of legal and political persecution as Gujarat's chief minister? A year after becoming the PM, he committed himself to federalism. He declared during a public speech in 2015, "As someone who has been CM for 13 years and PM for one, this forum has a special place in my heart. But, it is not just my sentiments that lead me to give such importance to this new institution. It comes from a serious conviction, born from my experience, that states have a vital role to play in the national development. This is especially true for large and populous countries, with a high degree of geographical, social and economic diversity. It becomes even more relevant, when the constitutional and political systems are federal in structure."

Perhaps, abolishing the Planning Commission was Modi's way of ensuring federal inclusivity in policy formulation. He replaced the Commission with the NITI Aayog in 2015. A month later, the Governing Council of NITI Aayog was constituted. According to an official statement, "NITI Aayog has been mandated with fostering Cooperative Federalism through structured support initiatives and mechanisms with the States on a continuous basis, recognising that strong States make a strong nation on the principles of '*Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas*'." In practice, the spirit behind the vision seems to have been cremated along with the hundreds of bodies choking crematoriums, forests and fields of rural India.

Since 2015, Modi has called half a dozen meetings of the Council where consensus was achieved on various developmental programmes. The last one was held virtually in February. It was attended by all heads of states and UTs, Union Ministers, Special Invitees. NITI Aayog Vice-Chairman, CEO, its members and top officers who administer India. India was then emerging from the first Covid wave. The meeting could have been the best opportunity for a future course of action since the CMs were not interested in political confrontation. But NITI Aayog's babus and others were neither concerned nor aware of the dangers ahead. Its top echelons were hardly involved in handling the pandemic on a huge scale.

Ladder climbers like Planning Commission member VK Paul, Ram Sewak Sharma, Chairman, National Health Authority and Balram Bhargava, Director General, ICMR are disturbing the delicate centre-state relationship. Dr Paul, a paediatrician by education, is advising on vaccination policy without even talking to the states properly. Sharma, who has one plum post after another during successive government, perhaps, floated the idea to put the PM's picture on vaccine certificate causing heartburns. None of them has ever dealt with pulmonary diseases. One of them discovered a cheaper stent for the heart ailment. The troika comprising Paul, Sharma, and Bhargava is like a herd of goats pretending to confront a charging crocodile.

And Paul and others in NITI Aayog saw the PM's last meeting as just another annual 'jaw-jaw' ritual. In his welcome remarks, Rajiv Kumar, Vice-Chairman, NITI Aayog, stated that the Sixth Governing Council Meeting was "unique since it brought together the country's highest decision-makers on one platform." Curiously, NITI Aayog conveniently forgot to include Covid management on the agenda. Moreover, no CM was asked for an opinion since the Centre was confident that the worst was over. Kumar claimed that the think tank finalised the agenda after discussions with state governments.

Even Paul, the most visible face on TV, ignored his duty to give a status report to national and state leaders on the possibility of a second wave and vaccination preparedness. On the agenda were subjects like making India a manufacturing powerhouse, reimagining agriculture, improving physical infrastructure, improving service delivery at grassroots level among others, with the PM suggesting a blueprint for the future. They met, they heard, they dispersed.

However, Modi briefly mentioned India's success in containing the virus. According to the government press statement, "…the Prime Minister said that Cooperative Federalism was the foundation of India's progress. Cooperative and Competitive Federalism should be made more effective and taken to the district level, he said. The country succeeded in managing the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic only because the Centre and the States worked together in a spirit of partnership."

But the states were hardly consulted while preparing the medical protocol, ordering vaccines, imposing restrictions on movement of people and services, and distribution of life-saving drugs and oxygen. Turf conscious apparatchiks in New Delhi rotated files among themselves or between their peers in other states without taking the local political leadership into confidence.

Barbed incentives and retaliatory revenge are weakening India's resolve to extirpate Covid. This mutating monster cannot be eliminated with Twitter wars and questionable toolkits, but only through federal magnanimity. A clash of egos will inflame existing hostilities. Competence, not competition, is the true spirit of federal cooperation to lead India out of the maelstrom of maladies.

QUOTE CORNER

Access for humanitarian goods is paramount. Attacks by militant groups on areas surrounding crossing points are unacceptable. Even wars have rules. First and foremost, civilians must be protected (in Gaza and Israel).

Antonio Guterres, UN Secretary General

Our two nations share a willingness to engage diplomatically with the DPRK (North Korea), to take pragmatic steps that will reduce tensions as we move toward our ultimate goal of denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula

Joe Biden, US president

Vaccine apartheid, coupled with the reckless calls for vaccine passports while not making the vaccines available to all nations, widens existing inequalities and makes it near impossible for the world to win the war against the pandemic.

Kenyan Foreign Ministry, on travel ban by the UK

MAILBAG

WRITE TO letters@newindianexpress.com

Right decision by the Congress

The Congress high command has done a good job by appointing a young and energetic second-level leader, who is having a clean image, as the Opposition Leader in Kerala despite the tremendous pressure from seniors who have lost the confidence of the party workers because of groupism and inefficiency. In the same manner, the high command has to appoint a capable young, energetic leader for the PCC and show the door to the inefficient selfish senior leaders for paving the way for the revival of the party.

Jayachandran Thoovat, Wayanad

Kudos to Egypt

This has reference to the news 'Israel and Hamas agree to ceasefire after days of deadly fighting'. Both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Nethayanu and the Hamas leadership claimed exceptional success and strategic victory respectively after a truce was initiated by Egypt after a 10-day war. There is an old saying that when two elephants fight the grass is the sufferer. We have to appreciate Cairo which took the lead to end the war now as well in the past.

S Arjun Prasanna, Bengaluru

End of an era

The present-day youth might have heard about the Chipko movement, which was a brainchild of Sunderlal Bahuguna. A staunch follower of Gandhi fighting against prohibition and untouchability, Bahuguna was a pioneer in environment protection as well in this country. He opposed the construction of big dams like Tehri, much before experts highlighted the dangers of such project in Uttarakhand and other hill states. His demise is an irreparable loss to the country.

Haribandhu Panigrahi, Tarbha

Need research on black fungus

This has reference to 'Black fungus spurt needs study: Docs (May 22)'. The increase in the number of Mucormycosis is distressing. The government's advisory comes in the wake of worrisome rise in cases of this fungal disease among Covid survivors. The set of dos and don'ts enumerated about the disease should be helpful. Further, the Centre needs to establish exclusively an advanced, dedicated Covid research centre for comprehending and solving such related issues. It calls for a detailed study and an in-depth analysis.

Dr C Ghanshyam, Vizag

Stop fudging of Covid data

Congress leader Kamal Nath's claim that the total Covid deaths in the state during March-April is more than one lakh is absolutely shocking. His claim is supported by the figures collected from the cremation grounds and graveyards with the exact fatal figure at 1,02,002. Since the data gathered by nath is from authentic sources, the government should not hesitate to reveal the genuine details in this issue. A distorted information will surely corrode people's trust in our democratic system.

Thomas K M, Muvattupuzha

Practical move by IMF

The IMF initiative to vaccinate 40% of the world's population to end the pandemic will be a game changer. The realisation that economic activity and the pandemic are not in compact with each other, so the best way to improve the economic activity will be to control the virus is a good move. Economic activities have come to a grinding halt. The IMF efforts to subsidise vaccine through donations and surplus doses will also be preventing any move to profiteering the vaccination campaign. Perhaps, this move may certainly accelerate vaccination.

Bijumon PN, Idukki

Right decision by Kerala CM

This has reference to 'CM Pinarayi takes over minority welfare portfolio, Church hails the decision. (May 22)' The decision of the Kerala Chief Minister to keep the Minority welfare portfolio is right, as Muslims are not the only minorities in the state. It gives a semblance of equity in the dispensation of welfare measures to all minorities.

Dharmarajan AK, Thalassery

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TWEETS OF THE DAY

Prashant Bhushan @pbhushan1
Though BJP's bank balance of ₹2253 crore is a fraction of what they spent in recent polls, this balance is mostly anonymous money

Rahul Gandhi @RahulGandhi
Due to mismanagement by Modi system, there is black fungus epidemic with Corona... PM might announce clapping the thali.

Dr Harsh Vardhan @drharshvardhan
#PMCaresFund tripled production of ventilators to cater to #COVID19 patients Utilisation audit exposes #CongressVentilatorConspiracy

Enough is enough: IMA seeks action against Ramdev

Asks Union health minister to either book yoga guru under Epidemic Act for his allopathy remarks or dissolve modern medical facilities

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @New Delhi

THE Indian Medical Association (IMA) on Saturday sent a legal notice to yoga guru Ramdev for allegedly misleading people by making "unlearned" statements against allopathy and its practitioners.

The apex body of doctors also demanded Union Health Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan to prosecute Ramdev under the Epidemic Diseases Act 1897 or accept his claims and dissolve the modern medical facilities in the country.

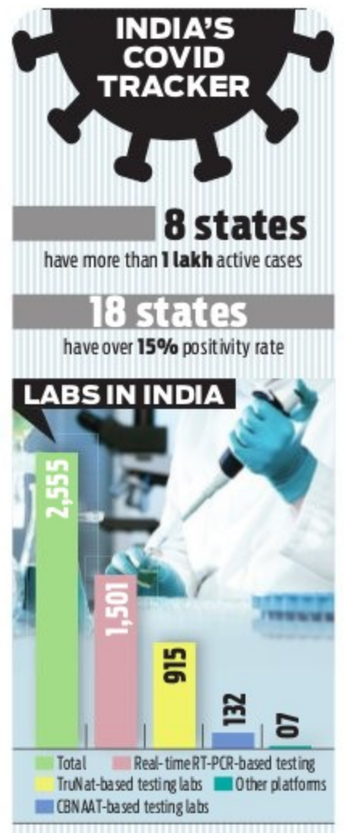
Lashing out at Ramdev for "repeatedly taking advantage of the situation and creating fear among the public to sell his illegal drugs", the IMA said "enough is enough". Ramdev should be prosecuted under the Epidemic Diseases Act as his "untutored" statements are "a threat to the literate society of the country as well as to the poor people falling prey to him", the doctors' association stated. It cited a video circulating on social media where Ramdev is seen saying that "allopathy ek aisi stupid aur diwalilya science hai. (allopathy is such a stupid science)". IMA recalled that Ramdev had called practitioners of modern medicine as "murderers" in the presence of the Union health minister while releasing his medicines.

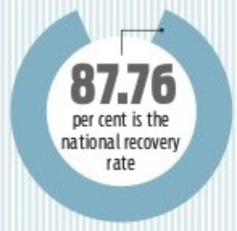
Reacting to the allegations, Patanjali Yogpeeth Trust said Ramdev has the utmost regard for doctors and he bears no ill will against modern science. It claimed that the video purportedly showing him criticising allopathy is "truncated" and taken "out of context".

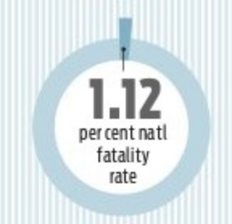
IMA quoted Ramdev as saying "lakhs of people have died after taking allopathic medicines". The doctors' body also said Ramdev claimed that Remdesivir, Faviflu, and all other drugs, which were approved by the Drugs Controller General of India, have failed in the treatment of Covid-19 patients. "The Union health minister who himself is a practicing modern medicine allopathic postgraduate and head of this (health) ministry, should either accept the accusation of this gentleman and dissolve the modern medical facility or boldly face and prosecute the person for his words of arson and book him under the Epidemic Act to save millions of people from such unscientific utterances," the doctors' body said. It accused Ramdev of making false claims "so that he can sell his illegal and unapproved so-called medicines and make money at the cost of the public at large".

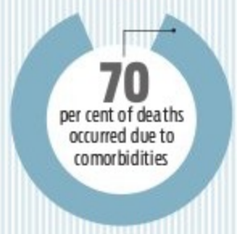
"The IMA resolves if the minister is not taking suo moto action, we will be forced to resort to democratic means of struggle to propagate the truth to the common people and knock the doors of the judiciary to get the due justice," it said. The association also mentioned earlier controversies around Ramdev's Coronil and Swasari medicines and the criminal complaint against him by social worker Tamanna Hashmi for "putting the lives of people in danger".

A Covid-19 patient receives treatment at the LLR hospital in Kanpur on Saturday | PTI

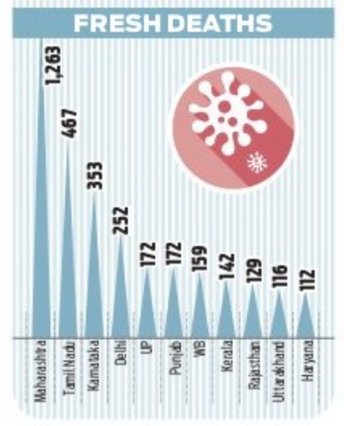








32,64,84,155
total samples tested till May 21, with 20,66,285 tests done on Friday



Kamal Nath's 'viral' statement gives fuel to 'toolkit' allegation

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@New Delhi/Bhopal

RECEIVING continuous flak from the Opposition over the handling of the second wave of coronavirus pandemic, the ruling BJP on Saturday got some fodder to launch a counter-attack after senior Congress leader and former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Kamal Nath used the term "Indian Corona" to describe the pandemic situation in the country.

Addressing a virtual conference on Friday, Nath had said that last year the world was saying the pandemic was caused by "Chinese virus". "But now our country has become infamous due to Indian Corona or Indian variant. Presidents and prime ministers of many countries are talking about the Indian variant," Nath said.

> **Even the WHO hasn't used the term 'Indian Corona' (which was mentioned by Nath). The WHO has stated that there is no variant of the Covid linked to any country**
>
> Prakash Javadekar, Union minister

Alleging that the Modi government isn't concerned about Covid management, Nath had said the Centre is busy with image management. "Earlier *Mera Bharat Mahan* was India's worldwide identity, but now *Mera Bharat Covid* is the country's new identity," he stated.

As the video of Kamal Nath's statement started circulating in social media, senior BJP leaders on Saturday launched a sharp broadside on the Congress, alleging that the grand old party is trying to "malign" the image of India.

Union minister Prakash Javadekar alleged that Nath's comment is aimed to weaken India's fight against the pandemic. Accusing the Congress of indulging in negative politics, Javadekar told reporters that the opposition party has refrained from playing any constructive role in dealing with the pandemic. "Even the WHO hasn't used the term (which was mentioned by Nath). The WHO has stated that there is no variant of the coronavirus linked to any country," said Javadekar.

Reacting to the BJP's criticism, Nath said, "Why are they (BJP leaders) circulating that small video clip? Why aren't they showing what I had said before and after that. Let them do what they want, including lodging a case."

Meanwhile, BJP spokesperson Sambit Patra, who had earlier hit TV screens with allegations of a "Congress toolkit", stuck to his accusations against the principal opposition party despite Twitter giving "manipulated media content" tag to some of the BJP leaders' tweets about the "toolkit". Patra claimed that Nath's remarks confirmed the saffron party's allegations against Congress.

A huge crowd tries to enter a vaccination centre in Jalandhar on Saturday | PTI

EU Parliament to support IPR vax waiver at WTO

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ New Delhi

THE European Parliament has passed a resolution to extend support to the India-South Africa proposal at the WTO, seeking a waiver of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) on Covid -19 vaccines.

"EU to set up a clear and coherent EU global COVID-19 vaccination strategy and therefore to support the Indian and South African World Trade Organization initiative for a temporary waiver on intellectual property rights for Covid-19 vaccines, equipment, and treatments while urging pharmaceutical companies to share their knowledge and data through the World Health Organization COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP)," the resolution stated.

The resolution comes weeks after US President Joe Biden announced that his government would support the proposal at the WTO. It is likely that the proposal would be taken up at the European Parliament during its session between June 7 and 10.

> **EU to set up a clear and coherent EU global vaccination strategy and, therefore, to support the Indian and South African WTO initiative for a temporary waiver on intellectual property rights for Covid-19 vaccines, equipment, and treatments**
>
> EU Parliament

In October 2020, India and South Africa had jointly initiated the proposal at WTO, but met with resistance from the West. The US' approval for the proposal triggered support from other quarters. In March, a group of Members of European Parliament (MEPs) had urged the European Commission, the highest decision making body of the EU, to support the proposal.

The issue was discussed during the India-EU Summit on May 8 with Prime Minister Narendra Modi urging the EU to support the joint India-South Africa proposal. European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen had also said that the issue was an important one and should be taken up open for discussion. India and the EU are major centres of vaccine manufacturing.

Before the second wave of the Covid pandemic hit, India had exported vaccines to over 90 countries. The European Union, which has produced 400 million doses of vaccines, has exported half of its stockpile of 200 million to 90 countries.

Dalit bodies demand relief for migrants

NEW DELHI: Dalit rights organisations appealed to PM Narendra Modi to provide immediate relief assistance and universal social protection coverage for people engaged in the informal sector. A large number of people in the unorganised sector and migrant workers belong to Dalit, adivasi, and OBC communities.

The condition of single women, including widows, the aged, orphans and the people with disability is likely to be compounded in the crisis, and deepen the pre-existing inequalities and restricted access to essential services by these communities, a joint statement by Dalit organisations said.

The organisations sought immediate provision of subsidised foodgrains, healthcare and income assistance regardless of entitlement documents and status of enrollment till the time they have been covered under all relevant schemes, restart community kitchens in rural areas, especially in remote locations. *ENS*

U'KHAND: POSITIVITY FALLS BELOW 10%

Dehradun: In a big relief to the Uttarakhand government, the positivity rate has come down to less than 10% for the first time this month. Though the average PR of the month is still 18.17%, experts say this is a good sign. However, the mortality rate is 1.85%, which is 65% more than the national average of 1.12%. Anoop Nautiyal, of Social Development for Communities Foundation, said higher death rate is the number one challenge for the state.

3 COPS BOOKED FOR MURDER OF TEEN

Unnao: Two police constables and a homeguard have been charged with the murder of a 17-year-old vegetable seller who was caught for violating the 'corona curfew' and allegedly beaten mercilessly, first outside his home and then inside a police station, officials said on Saturday. The incident, which took place in Bangarmau area on Friday, led to protests from locals who relented after senior police officers assured the boy's family of an impartial probe.

'Backlog' deaths fuel under-counting allegations

VINEET UPADHYAY @Dehradun

OF the total Covid-19 deaths Uttarakhand has reported, 42 per cent of them are "missed," prompting suspicion of under-reporting of Covid fatalities in the state. Government wings have been labelling such fatalities as 'backlog deaths' for six days in the health bulletin issued by the state government. It means such deaths were not reported by hospitals across the state.

Of the 923 deaths reported in six days in the bulletin, 384 are 'backlog deaths', making it 42 per cent of the total Covid fatalities recorded in Uttarakhand.

"After 65 deaths were discovered unreported in Haridwar by a private hospital, notices were served. Everyone is on alert now. No such thing happened in the first wave. This is the phenomenon of the second wave," said a doctor of the state health department on the condition of anonymity.

Interestingly, hospitals which failed to report these deaths include All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Rishikesh, other government hospitals and many private hospitals in Haridwar, Pithoragarh, Dehradun and other districts.

The daily bulletin clarifies: "Deaths reported from the previous date added in cumulative figure".

In some cases, these deaths were reflected in district reports/daily bulletins, but not submitted timely to the State Covid-19 Control Room. The lacuna has led to the belief that the fatality figures in the state carry serious discrepancies.

Anoop Nautiyal, from Social Development for Communities Foundation which has been collating and analysing data since March 15, 2020 when the first case of Covid surfaced in the state, said: "The fact that many government hospitals are unable to report deaths on time in Uttarakhand is a classic example of administrative collapse. We will never know all the reasons, but this is indicative of a systemic rot. If we seek improvements, we need to make serious and sustained efforts."

Officials from the health department told this newspaper that this is not an attempt to hide the causalities or cover-up the actual number of deaths.

AWARENESS

C'garh mask man has a message: 'Protect yourself, others'

EJAZ KAISER @ Raipur

At Ambikapur Collectorate most officers and staff would prefer using a face mask given by Ajay Agrawal, popularly known as Mask-Man of north Chhattisgarh.

With a missionary zeal, Agrawal (52) is creating awareness that mask is the best bet against Covid. "All are protected best when everyone wears a face mask since we all face a staggering spike in cases in the second wave," he said.

While health professionals and celebrities are often seen urging people to wear mask, Agrawal moves around distributing masks for free as a part of his daily routine since the pandemic struck in March last year. Based in Ambikapur town, he has so far distributed over 55,000 masks.

He sets out daily on his motorbike carrying some 200 masks and is quick to provide one to anyone found not wearing it or using a worn-out stuff. He visits the collectorate, government and private offices, railway station, busy market areas and other public places and offers masks at the roadside.

Agrawal buys a large piece of good-quality cloth in different colours and given it two tailors to stitch masks. Each tailor makes a minimum of 100 masks daily for him. He even places orders to private agencies to procure masks for distributing among the people. Each mask cost him Rs 20.

His work never stops. "I recently tested Covid positive. My brother and other family members continued with the work," he said. He has so far invested his personal savings of over Rs 11 lakh on his mask distribution. Besides Ambikapur, he has covered the adjoining district of Balrampur and Surajpur.

"Last year in March I attended a funeral where the family of the deceased gave a surgical mask to each visitor. That was when the idea struck me," he says, adding he feels very happy when someone calls him up for masks.

Ajay Agrawal creates awareness that mask is the best bet against Covid

He has also got 500 stickers prepared for government and private offices: "No Mask – No Entry'.

Picture of chief minister on vaccine certificates

The Chhattisgarh government has now started handing out vaccine certificates bearing photos of Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel instead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the 18+ age group.

Those in the age group of 18-44 years are being given vaccine certificates with the photo of CM Bhupesh Baghel. Vaccine certificates across the country have so far carried a photo of Prime Minister Modi along with his message.

Army CO seeks Sood help, seniors say it's not the way

MAYANK SINGH @ New Delhi

THE Indian Army has disapproved the step of a Commanding Officer (CO) of an unit in the Western Sector seeking assistance from Bollywood Actor and Philanthropist Sonu Sood. The letter apprised Sood about a 200-bed Covid care facility at Jaisalmer Military Station.

Disapproving the step, a senior officer termed the act "over enthusiasm" and said: "It is an over enthusiastic behaviour by the officer but the intentions are right aiming to get the facility started. But this is not the way and it should not have been done. He should have waited for procurement through government funds. There is no shortfall in public funds."

In his letter to Sood, the officer wrote: "With limited resources available with us, there is requirement of additional equipment". The equipment mentioned to be provided under Corporate Social Responsibility, included four ICU beds, 10 oxygen concentrators, 10 jumbo oxygen cylinders (7000 lts), one X-ray machine and two generator sets. Army will remain ever grateful to Sood for his generous act, wrote the officer.

ULFA RELEASES ONGC WORKER

Responding to an appeal from Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, the banned ULFA (I) outfit on Saturday freed ONGC employee Ritul Saikia kidnapped by them over a month back.

18 YEAR-OLD KILLED BY HER FATHER OVER LOVE AFFAIR IN U.P.

	Max	Min		Max	Min
Ahmedabad	38	27	Mumbai	31	28
Bhopal	38	25	Panaji	31	26
Jaipur	35	26	Patna	36	22
Amritsar	35	23	Lucknow	38	25
Chennai	35	28	Port Blair	28	23
Kolkata	36	29	Imphal	33	21
Srinagar	19	10	Chandigarh	35	21

BJP's Bengal MLAs say 'no' to central security cover

The saffron party had decided to upgrade their security in light of post-poll violence

PRANAB MONDAL @Kolkata

THE BJP national leadership's plan to provide central security cover to all party MLAs in West Bengal, in light of the post-election violence there, has received a jolt with at least a dozen MLAs refusing to accept it, saying it will damage the party's image.

They pointed out that MLAs of no other party are seen roaming around with central forces. They expressed concerns that heavy security cover may come as a barrier between them and the people whom they represent.

MLA Shankar Ghosh, a former CPI (M) member who joined the BJP ahead of the Assembly elections, said he doesn't need the security cover of central forces.

"I grew up in a political atmosphere where such the concept does not exist. I will prefer to roam in my constituency riding my scooter. My style of functioning helps me to connect with the common people. If I move around with central force personnel, it will not help me build a connection with the voters," said Ghosh.

Before the elections, 13 MLAs, who defected from the TMC to the BJP, were given central force security cover and the after the Assembly polls, the party decided to offer the same to all 77 MLAs.

"The decision was unprecedented. It was taken to highlight Bengal's lawlessness. Proving central force security to the MLAs was the brainchild of our national leaders," said a senior leader of BP's Bengal chapter.

Dabgram-Phulbari MLA Shikha Chattopadhyay said, "My constituency houses many slum areas. If I visit these areas with central force personnel, the local people will not speak without hesitation. If I cannot assess the voters' plight in our constituency, how will I be a successful public representative? have already written to my party informing my decision."

Anandamoy Burman, the BJP MLA from Matigara-Naxalbari, said the support of the local population makes him feel safe.

"The BJP has massive popularity in my constituency. I have got love and support of the people in this area which is my biggest security," he said.

TMC turncoat wants to go back to Didi

Kolkata: Former TMC MLA Sonali Guha, who joined the BJP after being denied the party ticket by the TMC, decided to quit the saffron camp and wrote an open letter to Mamata Banerjee expressing her interest to return to the ruling party's fold. She also apologised for her wrong decision. On her Twitter handle, Sonali wrote, "I am writing this with a broken heart that I took the wrong decision of joining another party."

Suvendhu's father, brother get Y+ cover

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @New Delhi

THE Centre has accorded Y+ category security to Sisir Adhikari, a former Trinamool Congress minister, now in the saffron camp. Sisir is the father of West Bengal Opposition leader Suvendhu Adhikari. Besides Sisir, Suvendhu's brother Dibyendu Adhikari, who is a TMC MP, will also get Y+ security cover.

Officials from the Union home ministry said it was decided to provide additional security to the two after a threat perception analysis showed a risk of political violence against them.

Sisir Adhikari

Under Y+ cover, the two will be protected by personnel of the Central Reserve Police Force. Suvendu Adhikari, who quit the TMC and joined the BJP, has been under the Z+ security category since December. A former aide of Mamata Banerjee, he defeated the CM in Nandigram in a bitterly fought election. While Sisir Adhikari quit the TMC and joined the BJP in March, Dibyendu remains a TMC MP representing West Bengal's Tamluk Lok Sabha constituency. The Adhikari family has accused the TMC workers of hounding them since they severed ties with the party.

Specialised diving teams of Indian Navy board INSMakar with side scan sonar & INS Tarasa for SAR operation for missing crew of Barge P305 | PTI

Navy deploys diving teams to look for bodies

Mumbai: With no trace of nine personnel from barge P305 and 11 from tugboat Varaprada six days after Cyclone Tauktae fury rendered the vessels adrift, the Navy on Saturday undertook an underwater search for the wreckage of the two vessels. The death toll on P305 rose to 66 with the recovery of six more bodies during the day, a Navy spokesperson said.

P305: DNA TESTS SOUGHT TO IDENTIFY 30 BODIES

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Mumbai

MUMBAI police will conduct DNA tests to identify 30 dead bodies suspected to be that of the crew members of the P305 barge, which sank off the Mumbai coast amid cyclone Tauktae on Monday night.

According to sources, the Mumbai police are struggling to establish the identity of the victims, and therefore, have sought DNA tests. A Mumbai police spokesperson said the Navy has so far recovered 61 bodies from the Arabian Sea and handed them over to the city police. Barge P-305, which housed personnel engaged in the maintenance work of an offshore oil drilling platform of the state-run oil and gas major ONGC, sank on Monday evening off the Mumbai coast. The barge had gone adrift before sinking.

"Police have handed over the bodies of 28 victims to their families after post-mortem. However, the identity of 30 victims is yet to be established. While some bodies are decomposed, some others have deep injuries and therefore they are beyond recognition," the official said.

Accordingly, the blood samples of the deceased and their immediate relatives are being collected and sent to the Forensic Science Laboratory at Kalina in Santacruz, he said. "After the samples are matched, the bodies will be handed over to the respective family members," he said, adding the DNA test will be completed in three days.

Maha govt attacks governor over not clearing names for legislative council

EXPRESS NEWS SERVCIE @Mumbai

THE Nationalist Congress Party minister from Maharashtra Nawab Malik on Saturday said it has been more than six months since the state government submitted 12 recommendations for members of the legislative council to Governor Bhagat Singh Koshyari, but he has taken no action on this.

His comment came after the Bombay High Court asked the Maharashtra Governor to submit an affidavit on the delay in appointing 12 members of the legislative council (MLCs) despite cabinet recommendations.

"As per the constitution, the governor has to act on the suggestions and recommendations of the respective state cabinet, but here the file has been gathering dust in Raj Bhavan. We hope after the High Court directive, the governor will act and give the nod for the appointment of 12 names as MLCs," Malik said.

NCP chief Sharad Pawar also criticised Maharashtra Governor for not approving these 12 recommended names. These names are in governor-appointed quota that has to be from various fields like literature, music, art, etc.

"I have been active in politics for more than 50 years but did not see such kind of governor who disrespects the state cabinet." He also complained to Prime Minister Narendra Modi about the governor's conduct.

The Congress, NCP and Shiv Sena—the alliance partners in the Maha Vikas Aghadi government—had recommended four names each to the governor.

KOREGAON CASE

'Stan has not let age defeat his passion for struggle'

MUKESH RANJAN @Ranchi

SURPRISED over 84-year old Stan Swamy's decision to reject a court offer to shift him to a hospital, people close to him believe he has placed himself along with Bhagat Singh and Khudiram Bose and is trying to send a message to the youths of Jharkhand.

They strongly believe his chances of survival will increase manifold if he is released from jail and taken back to Ranchi.

The NIA arrested Swamy in the Bhima Koregaon case in October, last year.

Swamy on Friday refused the court's offer to be shifted to JJ Hospital in Mumbai, stating that he did not want to be hospitalised there and would "rather suffer" and "possibly die very shortly" if things were to go on as they were.

According to activist Aloka Kujoor, who is associated with Stan for more than 20 years, even though he is 84-years old, he has not let his age suppress his passion to struggle for the cause of the poor and the *Adivasi* people.

"It is quite surprising that Stan has presented himself like Bhagat Singh and Khudiram Bose inside the jail through which he has tried to give a message to the youths of Jharkhand. As a fighter, he never considered himself weak and always stood firm for good cause," said activist Aloka Kujoor. The way he rejected the Court's offer of shifting him to the hospital, he has proved that he is attached to the people of Jharkhand, she added. Another priest, who has known Swamy said he believes his chances of survival will increase manifold if he is taken back to Ranchi.

EXPRESS READ

Naxal killed in Dantewada encounter

Raipur: A Naxal was killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Dantewada district on Saturday, a police official said. The gunfight took place at around 12.30 pm near Bengapalli village under Kirandul police station limits, over 340 kilometres from here, when a team of the District Reserve Guard (DRG) was out on an anti-Naxal operation.

Lalu gets CBI clean chit in DLF bribery case

New Delhi: The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Saturday have a clean chit to former Bihar chief minister Lalu Prasad in a bribery case involving DLF. Sources said the agency had started a preliminary enquiry against the former Bihar CM and the real estate developer DLF in January 2018. However, the agency did not find any evidence against Lalu.

Assam govt to bring cow protection bill

Guwahati: Assam Governor Jagdish Mukhi on Saturday said the government is planning to introduce a cow protection bill in the next assembly session to ban transport of the animal outside the state. Addressing the first session of the 15th Assam Legislative Assembly, Mukhi said people revere and worship cows, considering it a sacred animal.

IN LOCKDOWN MODE

A deserted Biswa Bangla Gate during the ongoing Covid-induced lockdown in Kolkata on Saturday | PTI

3 being quizzed in MP over ties to Pak intel

EXPRESS NEWS SERVCIE @Bhopal

TWO young women, who are sisters, were on Saturday questioned by the police and military intelligence in Madhya Pradesh's Indore district over suspected links to Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence.

The two women aged between 28 and 32 years were on the police and military radar following specific inputs about them being in regular touch with suspected ISI operatives and possibly retired and present army officers of Pakistan.

"Based on the intelligence inputs, two women and a man were detained. Their interrogation so far revealed that they were involved in suspicious activities. Apart from the police, multiple agencies are involved in questioning the trio," Indore Zone Inspector General of Police HC Mishra said.

According to sources, one of them is a school teacher, while the other is working at an automobile showroom.

They were using fake IDs on social media to regularly communicate with contacts (possibly ISI operatives) in Pakistan, for more than a year. The two women were in contact with a man from Jammu and Kashmir's Kupwara district, who is now working with the Army in Indore's Mhow district.

While refusing to share additional details, Mishra told *The New Indian Express* that the local police and intelligence agencies are working together in the matter.

Ignored by government, Bastar tribals left to fend for themselves

EJAZ KAISER @Raipur

IGNORED by elected representatives, tribals in Chhattisgarh's Bastar conflict zone have become increasingly defiant.

According to sources, political leaders either were not allowed enough space to engage during a crisis or were asked by party bosses to keep away from contentious concerns, giving way for the police or the administration to assume a center stage in taking decisions that may stand either in accord or discord with the needs or sentiments of the local population.

For instance, tribals have repeatedly protested against setting up security base camps in south Bastar. In one such demonstration on May 17 at Silger base camp, the security forces opened fire, killing three protesters, whom the police later called Maoists. This was strongly resented by locals residents.

The camp at Silger was then set up on 21 May and protests followed the next day. Over 5,000 people from more than a dozen villages reportedly participated in the demonstration. The Bastar, in recent years, has increasingly witnessed resistance by the villagers against major local projects that they believe are not in their interest.

And ironically, during these protests, the local elected representatives—MPs or MLAs—were nowhere seen getting involved to resolve the issues. "The spirit of democracy is missing in Bastar. The voice of local representatives doesn't seem to exist. How could the Maoists, who are specified to have been restricted in small pockets, manage to dominate the perception of the tribals or for that matter seems to outdo the existing government system? asked Manish Gupta, a journalist. Activists too agree that the local leaders have failed to address issues faced by tribal communities.

Sonu Sood comes to the aid of Jodhpur man

Actor Sonu Sood has come to the rescue of a patient in Jodhpur, suffering from a black fungus infection. He sent the drug Amphotericin B, used to treat the infection, from Mumbai to Jodhpur via Delhi. The patient is undergoing treatment at AIIMS Jodhpur. Facing difficulty in getting Amphotericin B, the patient sought Sood's help on social media. In a similar case, Sood helped a woman in Sri Ganganagar get the Amphotericin B. She had recovered from Covid-19 and was about to be discharged from hospital when doctors found out that she was having mucormycosis. The woman's son reached out to Sood, who flew 12 doses of the drug to the family.

RAJESH ASNANI
Our correspondent in Jaipur
rajesh.asnani@newindianexpress.com

JAIPUR DIARY

Man rides 420 km to bring Remdesivir for friend's mom

Amid the hard times brought on by the pandemic, the spirit of a few to come to the aid of those in need has lifted the morale of many. Arjun, who lives in Chandigarh, traveled 420 km by bike to Alwar in Rajasthan to bring Remdesivir for his friend's ailing mother. After receiving the drug, the woman's condition is improving. Sahil Rathore's mother tested positive for Covid-19 and was under treatment at a hospital in Alwar. Her oxygen saturation level dipped to 84. Doctors prescribed Remedesivir, but the drug was nowhere to be found in Alwar. Sahil then reached out to his friend Arjun, who bought the drug in Chandigarh and left for Alwar on his bike. The journey took him eight hours.

150-bed Covid Care Centre opens in state capital

Amid a shortage of medical oxygen and Covid beds, the state government has opened a 150-bed Covid Care Centre at the National Ayurved Institute (NIA) in Jaipur. Patients admitted here will be treated with Ayurvedic methods. Twenty-four beds have oxygen support. There are eight ICU beds with ventilator support. Vice-Chancellor of NIA, Professor Sanjeev Sharma, said that patients with minor and moderate symptoms will receive Ayurvedic treatment. If a patient arrives in a critical condition, he/she will be administered allopathic care.

Pulse oximeter bank opened in Jaipur

In a joint venture between Rajasthan Swasthya Yoga Parisad and Sindhi Adhikar Manch Association Plus, an OxiMeter Bank was inaugurated in Shastri Nagar, Jaipur on Saturday. Sindhi Manch President Govind Gurbani and Yog Parisad President Dr Rajendra Chabra were present at the inauguration. The bank will lend pulse oximeter free of cost to Covid patients under home quarantine. The device will be provided on showing a Covid positive certificate and a doctor's prescription. These patients have to return the device after use. As many as 115 coronavirus deaths and 6,103 positive cases were reported in Rajasthan on Saturday.

Nepal prez dissolves parliament, announces mid-term polls in Nov

Second time in five months | President rejects claim of both PM Sharma Oli and Oppn alliance to form a government | Opposition parties set to challenge decision legally

KATHMANDU

NEPAL'S President dissolved the House of Representatives on Saturday for the second time in five months and announced snap elections in November, rejecting both embattled Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli and the Opposition alliance's claims to form a government, a move that will be legally challenged yet again.

President Bidya Devi Bhandari announced in an early morning statement that the House of Representatives has been dissolved in accordance with Article 76(7) of the Constitution, ending a day of high-voltage political drama in the Himalayan nation, amidst the raging Covid-19 pandemic.

The President has called early elections pursuant to the Article, the dates being set for November 12 and November 19.

The announcement came after Prime Minister Oli in his last deal-sealing move on Friday midnight recommended the Office of the President to dissolve the 275-member House and announce dates for early elections.

Earlier, Oli and Opposition leader Sher Bahadur Deuba had staked separate claims to premiership, both of which were rejected by the president, citing that none had adequate grounds for winning a vote of confidence. "It has been noted that Prime Minister Oli counted those lawmakers as his supporters who extended support to the Opposition alliance, whereas the UML and JSP-N have forwarded letters stating action would be taken against those who had gone against the party to endorse the Opposition's claim," Bhandari said in a statement late on Friday.

Nepal PM K P Sharma Oli (centre) arrives at the parliament in Kathmandu | AP FILE

The president's announcement plunged Nepal into further political crisis, a reminder of her December 2020 decision when she first dissolved the House at Oli's recommendation, a move that swayed the course of Nepali politics towards uncertainty.

The Supreme Court had annulled the duo's move in February. Alarmed by the duo's move yet again, the leaders of Nepal's Opposition alliance on Saturday decided to take all legal and political means to counter Prime Minister Oli and President Bhandari's "unconstitutional and undemocratic" move of dissolving the House.

In a joint statement issued at the end of a meeting called to discuss the matter, the Opposition leaders expressed their commitment to unitedly defend the constitutional rights of Nepali citizens achieved at the end of years of political struggle.

They appealed to all political and civil forces to condemn and stand against the Oli-Bhandari duo's regressive, autocratic intentions.

They condemned their move as "unconstitutional, undemocratic and arbitrary."

The statement was signed by Nepali Congress President Sher Bahadur Deuba, CPN-Maoist Centre Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', CPN-UML leader Madhav Kumar Nepal, Chairperson of Janata Samajbadi Party-Nepal Upendra Yadav and Vice-Chair of the Rastriya Janamorcha Durga Paudel.

The Opposition alliance is devising a strategy to approach the Supreme Court with all its lawmakers on Sunday demanding to scrap the president's decision.

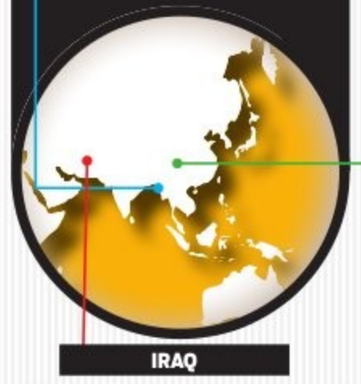
The parties blamed the president for making an assault on the Constitution and democracy in partnership with the prime minister, who had lost a trust vote in the House.

"The President should have appointed NC President Sher Bahadur Deuba as per Article 76 (5) of the Constitution as he had the support of 149 lawmakers of the lower house of parliament," My Republica website quoted the alliance's statement.

The parties claimed that the government is hell-bent on its attempt to prolong the autocratic rule despite the Covid-19 pandemic in the country.

The Nepali Congress also accused President Bhandari and Prime Minister Oli of misusing the Constitution for their own benefit as their personal property. PTI

ASIA MATTERS



MYANMAR

Suu Kyi in good health, says junta leader

Yangon: Myanmar's junta chief has said deposed civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi is in good health and will appear in court within days during the general's first television interview since the coup. Min Aung Hlaing, who toppled Suu Kyi in a February 1 putsch, gave a two-hour interview to Hong Kong's Phoenix Television on Thursday, with the full programme yet to air. "Aung San Suu Kyi is in good health. She's been staying at home and will appear in court in a few days," he said in an excerpt released on social media on Saturday. "In short, she has done everything she can." Suu Kyi has not been seen in public since she was placed under house arrest. She has been hit with a string of criminal charges including flouting coronavirus restrictions during last year's election campaign. AFP

IRAQ

US commander says more work needed to counter small drones

Baghdad: A month after an explosives-laden drone targeted US forces at an Iraq base, the top American commander for the Middle East says finding better ways to counter such attacks is a top priority, and the United States is still behind the curve on solutions. Marine Gen Frank McKenzie said the use of small drones by Iranian-backed militia is only going to grow in the next few years. The drones, which are cheap and easy to buy, are often difficult to detect and problematic to defeat. AP

CHINA

Three killed, 27 injured in series of earthquakes

Beijing: At least 3 people were killed and 27 others injured after a series of earthquakes that jolted Yangbi Yi Autonomous County in China's Yunnan Province on Friday, local authorities said. The quake was felt in all 12 counties and cities of the Dali Bai Autonomous Prefecture, with Yangbi being the worst hit. Two deaths were reported in Yangbi county and one in Yongping County. Three people were severely injured and 24 others had minor injuries, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. About 72,317 residents in 20,192 households were affected by the quakes. Rescue forces have been dispatched to the quake zone, and rescue efforts are under way. However, no casualties have been reported after a quake jolted northwest Qinghai Province on Saturday. PTI

Diana probe fallout: Ex-BBC chief quits high-profile job

LONDON

A FORMER BBC chief who was criticised for his "woefully ineffective" probe into Martin Bashir's deception in securing a bombshell interview with Princess Diana on Saturday resigned as chair of Britain's National Gallery.

Journalist Bashir tricked Diana into giving a 1995 BBC television interview in which she lifted the lid on her troubled marriage to Prince Charles, an independent investigation concluded on Thursday. Tony Hall, who had led an earlier investigation into the interview and was later named head of the BBC, said he had "today resigned as Chair of the National Gallery.

"As I said two days ago, I am very sorry for the events of 25 years ago and I believe leadership means taking responsibility," he said in a statement on Saturday. AFP

6-yr-old dies in US road-rage shooting

LOS ANGELES

A SIX-YEAR-OLD boy in Los Angeles was killed in a "road rage" incident as he was being driven to school, US media reported, the latest of a growing number of young victims of gun violence in the United States.

The incident appeared in some ways typical of the way a moment of anger, coupled with pervasive gun ownership, can take a high collateral toll.

It began, according to media reports, when a woman was driving on the 55 Freeway with her young son, identified as Aiden Leos, in the back. In what police said was a case of road rage — after one car apparently cut off another — someone suddenly fired a single shot from behind, striking the rear of the Leos car and piercing Aiden's back, news media reported.

"Mommy, my tummy hurts!" Aiden reportedly cried, as his panicked mother quickly pulled over. An off-duty policeman stopped and performed CPR and an ambulance then rushed Aiden to a hospital, but he was pronounced dead.

California state patrolman Florentino Olivera told the Los Angeles Times it was "an isolated road-rage incident."

In an equally senseless incident in Washington this week, a family group was standing on a sidewalk when a man on an electric scooter sped through, according to Washington police chief Robert Contee. When the woman shouted at the man to slow down, witnesses said, he stopped, pulled on a black mask and opened fire, critically wounding both the woman and her 5-year-old son. AFP

EXPRESS READ

2 dead, 8 wounded in Minneapolis shooting

Minneapolis: Two people were killed and eight more were wounded, one seriously, in a shooting in downtown Minneapolis early Saturday, police said. The gunfire stemmed from two men in a crowd who got into an argument near the Monarch nightclub, pulled out guns and started shooting, a local TV channel reported. No arrests were immediately announced.

Republicans reject Biden's infra deal

Washington: Prospects for an ambitious infrastructure deal were thrown into serious doubt late on Friday after the White House reduced President Joe Biden's sweeping proposal to $1.7 trillion, but Republican senators rejected the compromise as disappointing, saying "vast differences' remain. Skepticism had been rising on all sides over the lack of significant movement off Biden's $2.3 trillion plan or the GOP's proposed $568 billion alternative.

Biden meets S Korean president in bid to shore up Asia alliances

US president Joe Biden (left) and South Korean President Moon Jae-in (right) during an expanded bilateral meeting at the White House in Washington | AFP

WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden acknowledged there is no easy path to getting North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons but reaffirmed his "iron-clad" commitment to the US alliance with South Korea after talks with President Moon Jae-in.

"We're under no illusions how difficult this is — none whatsoever. The past four administrations have not achieved the objective. It's an incredibly difficult objective," Biden told reporters at a press conference with his South Korean counterpart at the White House.

> We're under no illusions how difficult this (to make N Kore give up nuclear arms) is. The past four admins have not achieved the objective. It's an incredibly difficult objective
>
> Joe Biden, US prez

The US leader also announced he had named veteran diplomat Sung Kim, the former US ambassador to Seoul, as his special envoy for North Korea.

Facing a nuclear-armed North Korea and an increasingly assertive China, Biden stressed his faith in traditional US alliances.

Biden called the US-South Korean partnership "the linchpin of peace, security" and promised a "shared approach" to the stand-off with North Korea.

He said that during their talks at the White House he and Moon discussed "freedom of navigation" for international shipping in the South China Sea, as well as "peace and stability" around Taiwan, which has been subjected to growing Chinese sabre-rattling.

Moon called denuclearization of the Korean peninsula "the most urgent common task."

US relations with historic allies in Asia and Europe suffered turbulence under Donald Trump, who recast long-standing partners as cutthroat business competitors and freeloaders. Biden has worked quickly to restore the previous balance, with an eye on the challenge from China.

Moon came to Washington as Biden's second foreign guest and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, who visited last month, was the first. AFP

LIFE SLOWLY RESUMES IN GAZA AFTER CEASEFIRE

Picking up pieces

Cafes reopened, fishermen set out to sea and shopkeepers dusted off shelves Saturday as Gazans slowly resumed their daily lives after a deadly 11-day conflict between Hamas and Israel. Aid trickled into the Gaza Strip as the focus turned to rebuilding the devastated territory a day after a ceasefire took hold.

Hamas defiant with military parade

Hundreds of masked Hamas fighters brandishing assault rifles paraded in Gaza City and the group's top leader made his first public appearance on Saturday, in a defiant show of strength after the war. Saturday marked the first full day of a ceasefire, and Egyptian mediators held talks to firm up the truce which ended the fourth Israel-Hamas war in just over a decade. Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden has said that there was no shift in the commitment of his administration towards the security of Israel but insisted a two-state solution that includes a state for Palestinians remains the only answer to that conflict. "...We still need a two-state solution. It is the only answer," he said in Washington.

248 people were killed in the Israeli attacks in Gaza Strip

2,000 houses were destroyed in the 11-day war

1 A Palestinian man sifts through the ruins of a building in the al-Rimal commercial district in Gaza City on Saturday

2 A man shifts a mannequin from a shopping center next to a building hit by an Israeli strike

3 Labourers fix a damaged store at a shopping center

4 Fishermen mend their nets before setting to sea at the main port in Gaza City

5 A shop owner inspects damaged products at his store

Text & pics: AFP

There's dust everywhere, dust from the Israeli bombs clinging to the clothes. We won't be able to sell them — Bilal Mansur, cloth merchant in Gaza

Spain's African enclave in a quandary over stranded Moroccan minors

CEUTA, SPAIN

DAYS after up to 10,000 people surged across the Moroccan border into Spain's Ceuta enclave, many hundreds are still here, mostly minors, posing a quandary for the tiny territory. "We can't yet say how many people entered Ceuta -- we estimate between 8,000 and 10,000, and it seems 6,600 have returned to Morocco," said Mabel Deu, one of the city's deputy leaders.

Most of the migrants swam, but some came in inflatable boats, with Spanish government officials saying 1,500 of them were under 18. That figure has not been confirmed by the city. "We don't know how many minors came in," Deu said.

By Friday, Ceuta had 438 children and teenagers in its care at two locations and was preparing a third, she said, acknowledging there were still "a good few hundred people wandering around the city". Those at the centres are registered, fed and clothed and given a place to stay after being tested for Covid-19. But many others are sleeping rough in parks or doorways, penniless and hungry.

Some came alone, while others crossed the border with friends or older siblings. Most are boys, either teenagers or in their early 20s. "They told us they came to visit or that they were coming to see Ronaldo play," Deu said.

And she accused the Moroco of "manipulative tricks" to encourage the wave of arrivals in a move linked to a diplomatic spat over Western Sahara. AFP

$590.03 bn was India's forex reserve as of May 14, according to RBI data. This was an increase of $563 million over the previous week

Overdues fall sharply as discoms double payments

Payments towards overdues shot up to ₹33,720 crore in March 2021

JONATHAN ANANDA @ Chennai

INDIA'S power distribution companies (discoms) recorded a sharp decline in overdues to electricity generators (gencos) in March 2021, data from the Union power ministry's PRAAPTI portal shows.

The most recent updates on the portal, which tracks the payment dues of India's discoms, shows that they have cleared a massive ₹33,720 crore of overdues in March 2021, more than double the ₹14,684 crore paid in February 2021. Total overdues have consequently fallen to ₹89,982 crore from ₹1,01,432 crore at the end of February. Excluding payables which are disputed, overdues fell from ₹84,478 crore to ₹67,417 crore. On a year-on-year basis, however, they still remain higher than ₹86,067 crore at the end of March 2020.

When peak nation-wide lockdowns were in force last year (between April and June 2020), payments from discoms to gencos had tailed off sharply. With a large portion of the economy inactive, demand dived and discoms struggled; compared to the ₹17,611 crore paid in March 2020, April 2020 saw them pay just ₹4,697.58 crore—a 73 per cent plunge. May and June 2020 also saw far fewer payments too, at ₹6,472 crore and ₹8,886 crore respectively.

The result was that dues mounted sharply—from ₹78,781.53 crore (including disputes) at the end of March 2020 to ₹1,03,440 crore at the end of June 2020, PRAAPTI shows.

Things improved in the following months, though, and the Centre's ₹1.35 lakh crore liquidity assistance package, disbursed gradually via loans from sector financiers PFC and REC, began to take an effect. However, while payouts recovered beginning July 2020, overdues remained stubbornly above the ₹1 lakh crore mark. Until March 2021, that is.

A senior state discom official said that while the loans from PFC and REC have helped, collections had also improved significantly during the second half of the financial year 2020-21: "The first quarter (of FY21) saw a very high deterioration in collections... things improved after lockdowns".

According to ICICI Securities, around ₹75,500 crore has been disbursed to states under the liquidity scheme as of the end of March 2021, with most of the rest sanctioned.

NEWSCOPE

An over-heated earth is churning up MONSTER CYCLONES

GURBIR SINGH

PTI

AFTER Cyclone Phyan struck the western coast around Mumbai in 2009, the region has been ravaged twice in less than a year by two monster cyclones. From Karnataka's coast, past Goa and Mumbai to Gujarat, Cyclone Tauktae has just completed its destructive run—49 ONGC men drowned on high seas and there are over 60 deaths in Gujarat's coastal areas. The loss of houses, livestock, and infrastructure is still being computed.

Last June, it was Cyclone Nisarga that made landfall in Maharashtra's Raigad district killing six and destroying property estimated at over ₹500 crore. This was just after Cyclone Amphan struck last year in May with wind speeds of 240 kmph along the Eastern coast, leaving 128 dead in West Bengal and Bangladesh.

Global warming, triggered by the effect of greenhouse gases, has led to a rise in the temperatures of ocean surfaces; and that is churning up these cyclones with deadly regularity. There is a double whammy: warmer temperatures are also melting the ice line at the two Earth's poles and raising the level of oceans, thus increasing flooding of coastal belts.

THE DIPOLE EFFECT

The impact of climate change is not just in the idiot head of some environmentalist. They can be seen in the increasing climatic distortions—from the bushfires in Australia to locust swarms in Africa and India.

The Bay of Bengal was earlier the cradle of cyclones as it was boxed in by land mass on three sides. This did not allow warmer surface temperature of the ocean to dissipate. Cyclones are generated when sea temperatures touch 28.5 degrees Celsius and above. This 'warm pool region'—which sees 3-4 cyclonic events annually for over a century—is now finding competition from the Arabian Sea in both numbers and ferocity.

The increased cyclonic activity in the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean is due to what climate scientists call the 'dipole' effect. The phenomenon, where the warmer waters move to the West of the ocean near Africa and the cooler waters drift to the East towards Australia, has been triggered over the last decade due to ice melts and rising temperatures, that has been pushing more warm water towards the African coast.

Caroline Ummenhofer, a key researcher on the 'dipole effect' from the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution in Massachusetts, quoted by *The Guardian*, points out that while ocean currents and winds in the Atlantic and Pacific can disperse heated water, the Indian Ocean on the other hand is susceptible to retaining heat because of the large Asian landmass to the north.

The warming water in the Indian Ocean has also begun affecting the Indian monsoon, one of the most important climate patterns in the world. "Climate models (are) suggesting a tendency for such events to become more frequent and becoming stronger," Ummenhofer was quoted as saying.

RISING OCEANS

Simultaneously, the rising temperature is impacting the vast oceans in two ways—one, thermal expansion of the water with increasing heat; and two, the melting of ice deposits such as glaciers which is pushing millions of tonnes of water into the oceans.

Global sea levels have been rising over the past century, but the process has speeded up in recent years. The National Ocean Service, of the US Department of Commerce, reckons the 2014 global sea level was 2.6 inches above the 1993 average, and continues to rise at a rate of about one-eighth of an inch per year. "The oceans are absorbing more than 90 per cent of the increased atmospheric heat associated with emissions from human activity," says a department report.

The higher sea levels, when they come with the push of a cyclonic storm, leads to destructive water surges deep into inland populations. Globally, eight of the world's 10 largest cities are near a coast. Mumbai, one recent unpublished report by city architects has predicted, is under threat of losing as much as 20 per cent of its land mass to flooding over the next decade.

The chain, which ends with cyclonic storms mowing down houses killing scores, is a long one. It starts with global warming through the greenhouse effect—the heat that is trapped by greenhouse gases, carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxides, wrapped around the Earth like a sweltering blanket. From 1990 to 2019, the total warming effect from greenhouse gases added by humans to the Earth's atmosphere increased by 45 per cent.

Maybe those who survived Cyclone Tauktae would find some sense in child activist Greta Thunberg's famous rant at the United Nations Climate Action Summit in 2019:

"You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words. And yet I'm one of the lucky ones. People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing," she said. "We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!"

Hero to begin production at all its plants from May 24

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU @ New Delhi

AFTER remaining closed for around a month, Hero MotorCorp, India's largest two-wheeler maker, is gearing up towards a gradual resumption of operations and will start production at all its manufacturing plants in India from May 24.

The company had already commenced single shift production at three of its plants—Gurugram and Dharuhera in Haryana and at Haridwar in the northern hill state of Uttarakhand—from May 17. Its other plants in India—Neemrana in Rajasthan, Halol in Gujarat and Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh—will start single shift operations from May 24. As will the Global Parts Centre (GPC) at Neemrana.

Hero Motocorp said that it continues to monitor the situation closely and will move to double-shift production gradually. In addition to producing for the domestic market in India, these plants will have enhanced focus on catering to the Global Business (GB) markets across the world.

The automaker, like many other manufacturers, had halted production across all its facilities in a staggered manner from April 22 as the second Covid-19 wave led to regional lockdowns across India.

These lockdowns also resulted in miniscule retail sales as a majority of showrooms in India remain closed. Since Covid-19 cases have now declined from the peak, there is speculation that multiple state government may now start opening up economic activity.

Meanwhile, retail two-wheeler sales declined by 27.63 per cent at 8,65,134 units in April as against 11,95,445 units in March, according to industry data. Experts believe that the month of May will be a near washout due to lockdowns.

EXPRESS READ

Punjab & Sind Bank back in black after 8 quarters

New Delhi: State-run Punjab & Sind Bank turned profitable in the fourth quarter of FY21 after eight consecutive quarters of losses, posting a profit after tax (PAT) of ₹161 crore on the back of improvement in recoveries and decline in bad loans. "The profitability is due to our focussed monitoring and also on account of recoveries... We were also able to arrest slippages to a great extent. This has helped in bringing down the credit costs, which enabled us to register profit," the bank's MD and CEO S Krishnan told reporters.

PGCIL board approves ₹2,202 cr investments

New Delhi: State-run Power Grid Corporation of India Ltd (PGCIL) said its board has approved investments totalling ₹2,202 crore for various power transmission projects. The Board of Directors and Committee of Directors on Investment on Projects, in their respective meetings held on May 21, have accorded approvals to the investments. These include one for the evacuation of power from Solar Energy Zones in Rajasthan at an estimated cost of ₹1,184.88 crore. Project will be commissioned in phases from December 2021.

Decoding the Reserve Bank's balance sheet math

SUNITHA NATTI

₹3.5 lakh cr
Expansion recorded in RBI balance sheet in FY21

₹12 lakh cr
Expansion recorded in RBi balance sheet in FY20

IT'S a pandemic year, but unlike other central banks, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has been resisting deficit monetisation and aggressive balance sheet expansion.

In FY21, its balance sheet grew by a modest ₹3.5 lakh crore as against an unprecedented ₹12 lakh crore expansion seen in FY20 (including the peak months of the pandemic's first wave: March-June, 2020).

But the numbers aren't strictly comparable since the RBI presented a truncated balance sheet of nine months (July 2020-March 2021) aligning its accounts with government finances, which follow a April-March cycle for the fiscal year. Prior to this, the RBI followed a July-June cycle.

Based on RBI's assets and liabilities published weekly, in absolute terms, the central bank's balance sheet grew from ₹53.3 lakh crore as on June, 2020 to ₹56.8 lakh crore as on March, 2021. The weekly data releases are generally considered accurate, though the final figures will be presented in the annual report to be released shortly.

In percentage terms, the balance sheet stands at 29 per cent of GDP, the highest in recent times, but that's largely due to the contraction in GDP seen last fiscal year.

Like other major central banks that adopted expansionary liquidity policies to fight the pandemic, the RBI too was aggressive initially, mopping up bonds and building forex reserves. But gradually, it settled for conservative expansion building forex assets. As on March 2021, they stood at ₹39.3 lakh crore, or 69 per cent of RBI's total assets. Compared to last year, the net addition is only about ₹3.7 lakh crore. Forex assets are considered the best way to expand balance sheets, but it could be a strain on currency and are also low-yield, given near-zero global interest rates.

Likewise, even though the RBI aggressively bought bonds initially, the total expansion in bond holdings between June 2020 and March 2021 isn't noticeably excessive at ₹1.6 lakh crore. This, despite the waning appetite among bondholders and a rising chorus for direct monetisation (a method where RBI buys bonds from the government directly instead of from financial intermediaries, and prints money).

Governor Shaktikanta Das stood his ground, perhaps because direct monetisation expands the balance sheet permanently and comes with its own drawbacks. Instead, he opted for unconventional open market operations, taking a temporary spike in the balance sheet. To counter the increase in assets (bonds in this case), RBI must increase its liabilites by an equivalent amount by printing money, which partly explains the rise in currency in circulation, which is at an all-time high at roughly ₹29 lakh crore.

This may not be entirely due to Indians' 'dash for cash', because currency withdrawals reduce both banking deposits and statutory CRR balances (which banks deposit with the RBI). But last year, the former grew by 11.5 per cent, while the latter remained unchanged at ₹5-6 lakh crore.

Any new notes issued must be backed by foreign currency assets or gold, which also partly explains the massive spike in forex assets, both in FY20 and FY21.

So here's the thing. The unusual purchase of bonds directly or indirectly involves money printing, on which RBI earns seigniorage, while it also gets interest on the bonds and securities it holds. Both will eventually be passed on as surplus transfers to the government, which perhaps explains Friday's unexpected ₹1 lakh crore dividend bonanza.

SECOND WAVE

Housing rates unlikely to fall despite lower demand

ARSHAD KHAN @ New Delhi

AFTER a significant correction last year, housing prices are likely to remain stable, or even witness a moderate hike in the coming months, despite a dip in demand due to the second Covid-19 wave.

"The sale of housing units rose across top cities in India in the first quarter of 2021 to nearly 1 lakh versus 87,000 in Quarter 1 of 2020. The continued increase in sales indicates that demand and customer confidence has returned to the market due to low home loan interest rates and higher affinity towards bigger homes," said Amarjit Bakshi, CMD of realty firm Central Park.

He added that it is highly likely that, for a short span of time, developers will follow the strategy of sticking to reduced profit margins. But prices will tend to tick upwards as the market gains momentum.

Vikas Garg, Deputy Managing Director of Gurugram-based MRG World, a conglomerate that specialises in affordable housing, said that the impact of the second wave has been mild. "Some markets have witnessed a minimal increase ranging between 1-3 per cent. Prices are already subdued and as raw material costs are high, making it difficult for the realtors to consider price correction," he said.

After housing sales fell around 90 per cent in Q2 of CY20, many developers started offering discounts of up to 10 per cent. Besides this, lower interest rate and a reduction in stamp duty and circle rates also lifted market sentiment. However, the second Covid-19 wave has broken the momentum.

Sanjeev Arora, Director at property consultant firm 360 Realtors, said that on an average, there has been an increase in prices by 3 per cent in Q12021 against the previous quarter. "In the coming months, the prices are expected to be relatively range-bound," he said.

Business & Beyond

Augmented ICU ventilator facilities opened at IPGI and SSH of SAIL, RSP

Augmented ICU ventilator facilities for the treatment of COVID patients at Ispat Post Graduate Institute (IPGI) and Super Specialty Hospital (SSH) in SAIL Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP) was dedicated by Dharmendra Pradhan, Union Minister of Petroleum & Natural Gas and Steel, on May 20, in the presence of Faggan Singh Kulaste, Union Minister of State for Steel through the online mode. To tide over the surge in the COVID cases, according to the instructions of the steel minster, it was decided to upgrade the facility to a 100-bed ICU for covid care and treatment at SSH, the company said.

Vedanta Aluminium announces COVID insurance for staff of business partners

Vedanta Aluminium & Power Business has, on the occasion of the International Day of Families, extended the COVID Kavach Term Insurance Policy for employees of business partners across its plants in Jharsuguda and Lanjigarh in Odisha, and BALCO in Korba, Chhattisgarh. Ajay Kapur, CEO, Aluminium & Power and MD, Commercial, Vedanta, announced the move to all staff on the occasion through a video message. Last year, the company had enhanced its term life insurance for all employees. Vedanta said.

Vedanta supports Govt of Odisha with oxygen cylinders

Vedanta Aluminium is providing filled medical oxygen cylinders to the Government of Odisha to support the fight against the second wave of the COVID pandemic. A total of 2,000 oxygen cylinders will be supplied as part of this initiative, the company said, adding that medical oxygen cylinders were handed over to the state government on May 20, in the presence of Nitin Jawale, MD-Industrial Promotion & Investment Corporation of Odisha Limited.

Anti-Terrorism Day observed at PPT

The Paradip Port Trust observed Anti-Terrorism Day last week with a pledge being administered by Ashok Kumar Sahu, Sr. Dy. FA, to employees. "The objective behind the observance of this day is to wean away the youth from terrorism and the cult of violence by highlighting the sufferings of common people and showing as to how it is prejudicial to the national interest," the company said.

Steel minister inaugurates jumbo Covid-care facility

Union Minister of Steel Dharmendra Pradhan has dedicated a 200-bed gaseous oxygen-equipped COVID-care facility at Burnpur made by SAIL-ISP, Burnpur. It is also equipped with 10 ventilators and eight ICU beds. SAIL-ISP Burnpur has converted its 32-room Chhotadighari Vidyapeeth HS School into a 200-bed Jumbo COVID Care Facility put into service last week. The new temporary facility is a part of a larger 500-bed Jumbo Covid-care centre.

TK Sahoo assumes charge as Regional Head of Union Bank of India, Sambalpur

Tapan Kumar Sahoo has taken charge as Regional Head of Union Bank of India, Sambalpur Region. Prior to this, Sahoo served as the Deputy Regional Head of Union Bank of India, Bhubaneswar Region. The new regional head, who holds a Master's degree in Forestry and another in Business Administration, began his banking carrier as a Probationary officer in 1998 and has over 22 years of experience serving in various functional capacities at branches and regional offices.

Leclerc claims pole for Monaco Grand Prix

Charles Leclerc will start on pole for his home Monaco Grand Prix after setting the fastest time in qualifying Saturday despite ending the session with suspension damage to his Ferrari. Red Bull's Max Verstappen will begin alongside him on the front row of Formula One's iconic street race with Lewis Hamilton on the fourth row of Sunday's grid.

With 63-61 margin, Batra re-elected as FIH president

After narrowly beating Belgium's Coudron, Batra promises to understand concerns of those who voted against him and help sport grow in next few years

SWAROOP SWAMINATHAN
@Chennai

FIRST up, the unsurprising news from Lausanne. Narinder Batra has been re-elected as the president of the International Hockey Federation (FIH) during the body's 47th Congress. The surprising bit? He just about hung on, to claim a 63-61 victory over Belgium's Marc Coudron.

In a press conference that followed the two-day virtual Congress, Batra took cognizance of the result and promised to address all issues. It can be safely assumed that the Asian and African federations delivered Batra the narrow win while the European and the Pan-American bloc voted against the incumbent because of several issues, chief among them being the blue riband international events clustered in India (the next junior men's World Cup and the senior men's World Cup will also be held in India). While FIH will not release details of which federation voted for which candidate, Batra promised to address the concerns of the '49%' of the members who voted against him.

"From the election results, you can say that nearly 49% of the members want change," he said during the press conference. "I want to understand their issues and make sure we implement them. It's my duty to understand where they feel I didn't live up to expectations. Our job in the next three years is to make hockey the most preferred sport."

Big push for Hockey 5s

One way the FIH plans to do that is to try and accelerate the growth of hockey 5s. In fact, at one point, Batra said 'it is my dream' to watch hockey 5s at the Olympics. The FIH hopes they can eventually have both the traditional 11-a-side version as well as the hockey 5s at the Games together.

Narinder Batra

"I have had this conversation with the International Olympic Committee (IOC)," said FIH's CEO, Thierry Weil. "The IOC assured me there is no danger to the 11-a-side format at the Olympics. Hockey 5s being at the Games will only help increase visibility of the sport."

At the basic level, they plan to take hockey 5s to countries that haven't hosted any FIH event to date. "We have our bid process ongoing for the 2023 Hockey 5s WC. I can only say there is going to be nice surprises. We will have it in places that haven't hosted an FIH event." There are even plans to have a mixed 5s event but the journey to the Olympics is a lot more complex.

However, one thing is certain. It looks like the FIH have put most of their eggs in the hockey 5s basket as a way to promote and take the game forward.

'Complete saving mode'

Like most International Federations, the FIH too is dependant on the Olympics for healthy financials. After it was postponed last year, the FIH had to take a loan from the IOC to make ends meet.

While the FIH refused to reveal the size of the loan, Weil did say that 'they are in complete saving mode'. They are right now monitoring the pandemic situation and hope that air travel will be opened soon.

After anxious moments, all is well for boxers in Dubai

INDRANEEL DAS @Chennai

INDIAN boxers have never been subjected to so much of uncertainty in the past than this year because of pandemic. Spate of positive cases of top players and coaches, cancellation of national camps, uncertainty over participation at international meets and now this.

There was confusion in the air, literally, when SpiceJet flight SG 142 hovered above Dubai international airport in the wee hours of Saturday. The flight had flown with special permission and had on board a 31-member Indian boxing team (men's and women's) for the Asian Championships to be held between May 24-30.

It is understood the flight was hovering above the Dubai airport for about 45 minutes before being allowed to land after pilots raised lack of fuel issue. Even after landing the team was boxed up inside for about two and a half hours as authorities in Dubai were not allowing them to enter. The United Arab Emirates has barred entry of Indians except UAE nationals, diplomatic passport holders and official delegation letter holders. The boxers are travelling as part of delegation to participate at the Asian Championships which is crucial for the pugilists.

India women boxers & support staff after reaching Dubai on Saturday | BFI

The Boxing Federation of India had to get in touch with the Indian Embassy in Dubai, who helped the boxers disembark and complete immigration formalities. There were anxious moments for the boxers when they were parked on the bay. Apparently, it was about a formal letter that needed to be procured from the local authorities. "Once that was done, there was no problem with the boxers," said BFI.

The BFI said the Embassy and India's ambassador Pavan Kapoor helped the team to obtain the necessary documents. Since it was early in the morning, the flight landed around 6.20am IST (4.50am UAE time), the official procedures took more time than usual. BFI also thanked the UAE government and Asian Boxing Confederation for their help. The flight flew under the international bio-bubble agreement and would ferry passengers on its way back.

Since the Asian championships was of primary importance for the boxers to compete, the BFI had to go out of their way to facilitate the movement. The team left after all necessary permissions were sought. The team was subjected to two RT-PCR tests — one at the airport and one in hotel.

Meanwhile, Vinod Tanwar (49kg), who was initially named as part of the 20-member squad for the Championships, has been withdrawn after he tested positive. He was not part of the camp.

ATLETICO, KINGS OF SPAIN

MADRID: Atletico Madrid survived a dramatic final round to clinch their first Spanish league title since 2014 with a 2-1 come-from-behind win at Valladolid on Saturday. Luis Suarez scored the winner for Atletico as they beat Real Madrid for the title in a wild finish that had plenty of twists with the two remaining title contenders playing at the same time. Real couldn't repeat as champion despite rallying to defeat Villarreal 2-1 at home. The results left Atletico two points in front of Real at the end of the 38-round season, giving Diego Simeone's team their second league title in 25 years. Atletico's previous league title was in 1996, when Simeone still played for the club. Atletico's 11th league title ended a seven-year dominance by Barcelona and Real Madrid in Spain. Since 2014, Barcelona had won the league four times and Real twice, including last season. Real Madrid were trying to win back-to-back league trophies for the first time since 2007-08. Barcelona, who beat Eibar 1-0, was out of contention.

Atletico Madrid players celebrate after winning the La Liga title | AFP

Paddlers working around challenges

AYANTAN CHOWDHURY @New Delhi

THE second wave of Covid-19 and subsequent lockdown in most parts of the country has robbed India's Tokyo-bound paddlers the chance to train in the way they would have wanted. In ideal circumstances, A Sharath Kamal would have been in Germany training with his club Borussia Dusseldorf.

G Sathiyan had made plans to go on a training-cum-exposure trip to one of the Asian countries while Sutirtha Mukherjee had envisaged training with high-quality foreign sparring partners according to her coach Soumyadeep Roy.

Instead, problems like being unable to access the gym, or stadiums and clubs is the ground reality.

"It is an unprecedented situation, so there is no point in complaining. Our Sports Ministry has helped a lot and we are managing to the best of our abilities. But we will be at a disadvantage compared to countries where training centres were open and players got more opportunities," was how Sathiyan summed up the situation.

Due to lockdown in Tamil Nadu, Sathiyan has not been able to travel to his coach S Raman's centre as well as to the gym. Video calls and buying home equipment for fitness is the best that he has been able to do. He does have a sparring partner in Anirban Ghosh and is training on his home table.

In Sharath's case, practicing at his usual club or at the stadium has been affected and he is training inside the hall situated on the roof of his apartment. He has been planning to go to Europe for a fair few months now, but procuring visa has been a tough nut to crack. He is hoping to visit Denmark and train with the Danish national team early next month. "It has been difficult but the situation is so bad that we have to make alternate arrangements and keep spirits high. I'm confident of putting up a good show in Tokyo but ideally would have loved to have prepared the way I had planned initially,"

Sharath and Manika Batra have qualified for mixed doubles and they are India's best shot at a medal in the sport. But specialised training for the event prior to departure is another worry currently. The situation in West Bengal has also forced the newly-elected state government to initiate lockdown-like measures and Sutirtha has had to make do with specialised fitness training and sparring with two players at Soumyadeep's coaching centre.

Full story: newindianexpress.com

EXPRESS READ

Lewandowski raises bar

BERLIN: Bayern Munich striker Robert Lewandowski scored his 41st Bundesliga goal of the season on Saturday to break Gerd Mueller's 49-year-old German league record (40) for a single campaign. Lewandowski scored in Bayern's 5-2 win over Augsburg.

Russian athletes at Oly

MONACO: World Athletics has declared 23 Russian track and field athletes eligible to compete under a neutral flag ahead of the Tokyo Olympics. With their national federation under a doping suspension, Russians must apply for individual exemptions.

Ruud wins Geneva title

GENEVA: Casper Ruud won the ATP Geneva Open with a 7-6 (8/6), 6-4 victory over Denis Shapovalov in Saturday's final. Meanwhile, World No 5 Stefanos Tsitsipas beat Lorenzo Musetti 4-6, 6-3, 6-0 to reach the final of an ATP event in Lyon.

BWF scoring system

KUALA LUMPUR: Badminton's scoring system remains unchanged as an attempt to replace the existing three-game format of 21 points each with a best-of-five of 11 points failed to get the required two-thirds majority during the AGM.

BATTLE FOR TOP FOUR

On the final matchday, three teams will battle it out for the last two Champions League spots in the Premier League. Here's a look at the teams who are in contention...

CHELSEA | 3RD

PTS: 67 | GD: 23

OPPONENTS - ASTON VILLA (A)

A win will definitely seal third spot. However, if they draw or lose, both Liverpool and Leicester can overtake the Blues if they manage to post wins. Villa have nothing to play for but they have shown this season that they can go toe-to-toe against big teams. Chelsea will be aware of the threat and looking to get the job done.

LIVERPOOL | 4TH

PTS: 66 | GD: 24

OPPONENTS - CRYSTAL PALACE (H)

If they win, they'll most likely qualify. Though they are level on points with fifth-placed Leicester, they have a handy goal-difference advantage. In the previous fixture, Liverpool had hammered Palace 7-0. Nerves are bound to be there in front of returning fans at Anfield, but it will be a shocker if Jurgen Klopp's men don't get over the line.

LEICESTER | 5TH

PTS: 66 | GD: 20

OPPONENTS - TOTTENHAM (H)

The team would be hoping that both teams above them will drop points and they can pull off a big win against their north London rivals. Even though Spurs lost in the previous game, they have enough ammunition in their team to play spoilsport. They will definitely not take their eyes off Harry Kane.

LIVE ON STAR SPORTS NETWORK @ 8:30 PM

More training facilities added to KISCE in Srinagar

FIROZ MIRZA @Chennai

WHEN she started training in 1999, **Bilquis Mir** used to wear pheran, a traditional Kashmiri outfit, over a tracksuit to evade the questions of people around her. A lot has changed in the past 22 years in the Valley as Mir went on to represent the country in the kayaking and canoeing World Cup and coach the national team apart from acting as a water sports judge for the 2018 Asian Games. The sport has also flourished in the state with Dal Lake being transformed into the headquarters for the J&K Water Sports Academy and Mir serving as its director.

Yet another feather was added to its crown on Saturday with the sports ministry deciding to include kayaking and canoeing at the Khelo India State Center of Excellence (KISCE) in Srinagar. The KISCE, launched in April 2021, had training facilities only for rowing.

"Players from J&K won 82 medals in national events in the last three years. Addition of kayaking and canoeing to KISCE will boost water sports further in the region. It's a gift to J&K by the sports ministry and state government," Mir told this daily from Srinagar.

The J&K Sports Council and the state government had earlier made a request in this regard. "It has been decided to equip the KISCE in Srinagar with training facilities for the two disciplines so that more sporting talent from the state has the opportunity to excel in the sport and represent India in world-class competitions," sports minister Kiren Rijiju said in a release. The Sports Authority of India and the J&K Sports Council will assess the requirements to implement training in the two disciplines, including coaching and equipment support to be added.

Mir used to train with boys when she started as girls were not allowed to take up sports professionally in the region at that time. The centre, however, now has more than 200 female trainees. "In 2009, I competed in the World Cup and reached the semifinals. If we had these kinds of facilities at that time, I am sure we could have held a place in the finals too. The launch of KISCE and now the inclusion of kayaking and canoeing will enthuse young athletes of the sport and I am sure we will be able to attain a podium finish in the Olympics in the future," said Mir.

Indian Kayaking and Canoeing Association (IKCA) also hailed it as a great step towards improving water sports in the country. "Kayaking, canoeing and rowing together have a total of 63 medals in the Olympics. If we can provide training to youngsters in these disciplines, then India's medal haul in the Olympics can go up significantly. Also, Kashmir is a very strategic location for the academy since the weather matches with European countries where most competitions are held. This is a great step towards improving water sports in India," said Prashant Kushwana, IKCA secretary-general.

Chhetri & Co begin training

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @Chennai

THE Indian football team got down to business on Friday evening as the players had their first training session in Doha, Qatar, ahead of three crucial qualifying matches for the 2022 World Cup and 2023 Asian Cup. Having assembled in New Delhi on May 15 and quarantined for a few days, the players flew to Qatar on Wednesday. On arrival, all the players and coaching staff were tested for Covid-19 and returned negative.

With India taking on Qatar on June 3, followed by matches against Bangladesh and Afghanistan on June 7 and 15 respectively, it is imperative that Sunil Chhetri and the rest of the players make best use of the two-week preparatory camp that has been arranged.

FOCUSSED ON TASK AHEAD

Getting meets in international circuit best way to prepare for Olympics: Sreeshankar

MARTIN JOSEPH @Kochi

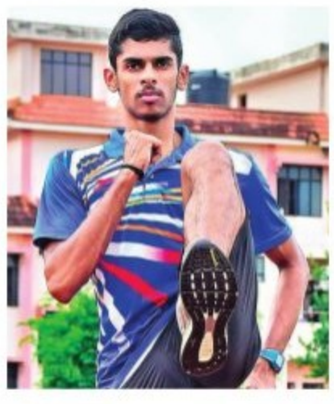
EVEN before Murali Sreeshankar was born, his father and coach S Murali was preparing a pathway for him in the hope that his son would one day compete in the Olympics.

From the Olympic rings in his room to the Olympic medal-shaped design carved on the entrance door of their home, these have been constant reminders and motivation for the national record holder through his formative years.

And in a few months' time, the long jumper from Kerala will be among the select few athletes who will be representing India at the Tokyo Olympics. "All this was done even before I started doing sports. It was done when our house was built," said Sreeshankar during an interaction on Saturday.

He adds: "Even the shelves are all filled with Olympic motifs. It all was done even before I was born. It wasn't deliberate but it all came naturally."

While a Tokyo ticket was secured earlier this year at the Federation Cup where he also re-wrote his national record, the worry continues to be over a lack of competitive meets to prepare for the quadrennial event. "I'm looking forward to some competitions in Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan or hopefully in Europe if the travel ban is lifted. If I'm not able to participate there, then definitely, I will be competing in the Indian Grand Prix-4 and the Inter-State championship. Of course, it is more about simulating a competition atmosphere and if I jump in the domestic circuit, it's also a big help for me. It is a competitive atmosphere and my peers will try to push me hard. But getting competitions in international circuit is entirely different. It's the best way to prepare for a big event like the Olympics. At least a Diamond League meeting, then it will be a big breakthrough for me," he said.



The Palakkad native admitted that it wasn't just about physical preparations but preparing mentally for what will be his first ever Olympics so that he doesn't get overwhelmed by the occasion like he did back at the 2019 World Athletics Championship.

"When I competed there, I was suddenly surrounded by great jumpers whom I had only seen on Youtube. I got a bit anxious and it affected my performance as well," he said while adding that he is seeking the professional help of psychologist Bhawna Chauhan, who is attached with the Sports Authority of India.

And the current Covid-19 situation across the country can be mentally hard on anyone, but Sreeshankar doesn't want to lose focus. "Even in my surroundings, we have lost three lives in the span of one week. So it is a tough situation for me. Whatever happens or the uncertainties are there, I have my responsibility towards this country as an Olympic hopeful. So I'm committed 100 per cent towards fulfilling that responsibility for my nation."

Full story: newindianexpress.com

A new public park skimming the surface of the Hudson River atop 132 concrete "tulips" opened this week for New Yorkers eager to emerge from a year of onerous pandemic restrictions. Little Island, which can be accessed free-of-charge by two pedestrian bridges and has 350 species of flowers as well as shrubs and trees, offers lush green spaces and scenic views into southern Manhattan and New Jersey.

2 vaccine doses have 81% efficacy vs B.1.617.2 strain

New UK govt research indicates a person needs to be jabbed twice to develop strong protection against variant first detected in India

In this file photo, employees pack boxes containing vials of Covishield, a version of the AstraZeneca vaccine, at the Serum Institute of India in Pune | AP

MEDICINE

LONDON: Two doses from either the Oxford/AstraZeneca or the Pfizer vaccine are over 80% effective in preventing infection from the B.1.617.2 variant of the coronavirus, a new British government study has reportedly found.

The UK findings are said to be based on data from Public Health England (PHE) and have also revealed that the two doses provide 87% protection from the B.1.1.7 variant, first discovered in Kent region of England and also considered highly transmissible.

According to *The Telegraph*, the latest study's findings were presented to a meeting of the government's New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group (Nervtag) this week.

Financial Times reported that the data, which is based on pooled figures from the Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines, shows that one dose provided 33% protection against symptomatic infection of the B1.617.2 variant and 51% against B.1.1.7.

"This suggests a single shot offers 35 per cent less protection against B.1.617.2 compared with B.1.1.7," the *Times* wrote, citing its own analysis, adding that the research indicates the importance of taking two doses for protection against the variant.

A pair of models presented at the Nervtag meeting backed the research findings. One of them suggested that a single dose was about 50% less effective against B.1.617.2 than with B.1.1.7. The other model showed a 20% reduction.

Two vaccine doses provided 81% protection against B.1.617.2, the *Times* said.

The latest PHE statistics released earlier this week show that case numbers of the B.1.617.2 variant had risen by 2,111 over the past week to 3,424 across the UK.

"If I had to put a guess today it would be 20 or 30% rather than 50% (more infectious than the Kent variant). But there is still uncertainty, 50 % might be a reasonable worst case scenario," Dr Jeffrey Barrett, director of COVID-19 genomics at the Sanger Institute, told the *BBC*, in reference to the rate of transmissibility of the variant of concern (VOC) first detected in India.

Meanwhile, PHE officials are also closely monitoring a variant under investigation (VUI) in the Yorkshire region of England, which is showing high transmissibility.

It comes as the National Health Service (NHS) further expanded its vaccination programme and announced that it will open bookings for people aged 32 and 33, adding to the over-34s cohort, from Saturday.

NHS England said that the third expansion of eligibility in just one week comes as over four in 10 adults have now had both jabs.

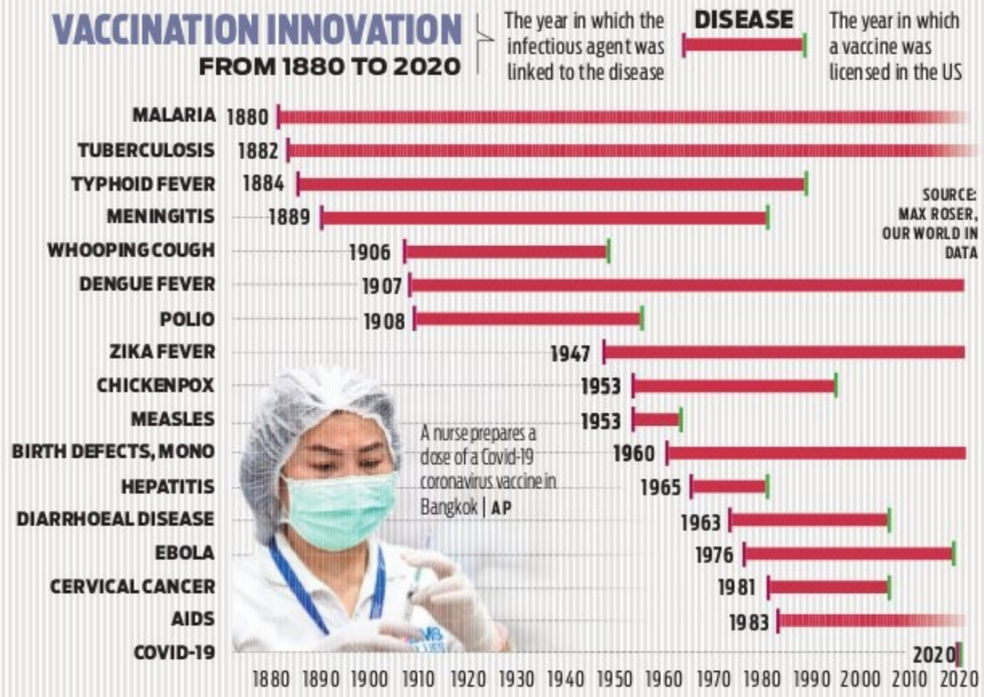
'Only days after we extended the offer of a vaccine to 34 and 35 year olds, we are now rolling out the invite to 32 and 33 year olds - an incredible step forward in the biggest and most successful vaccination programme in NHS history,' said UK Health Secretary Matt Hancock.

A new laboratory in Exeter, south-west England, opened last month and is dedicated to analysing wastewater, making it one of the biggest wastewater processing labs in the world. Increased genomic sequencing of sewage samples are expected to provide more clues to where variants may be circulating undetected in communities.

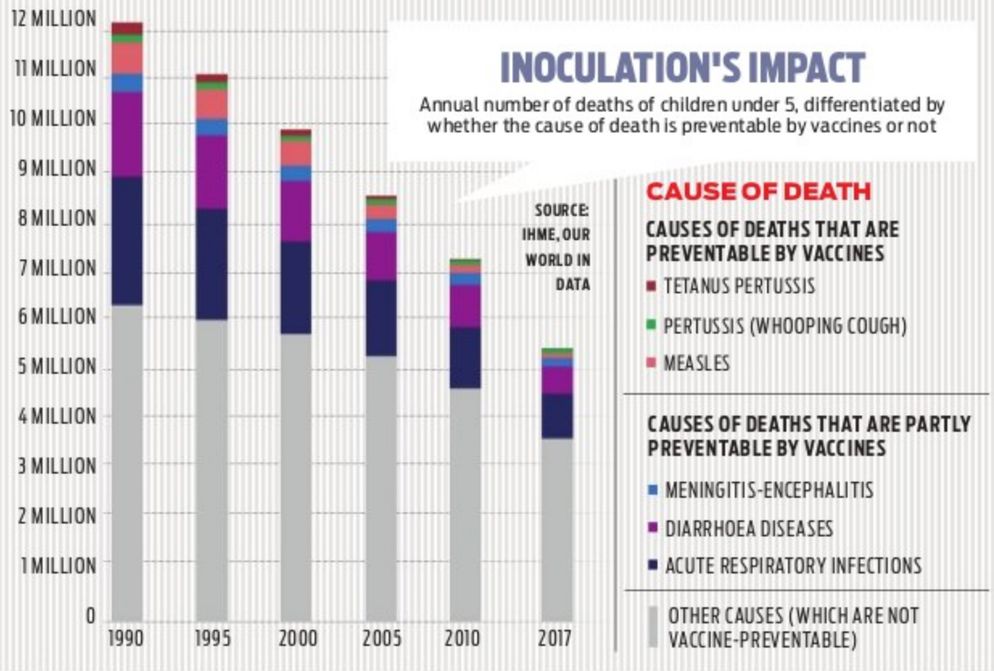
EXFILE • HEALTH

MEDICINE'S MAJOR MILESTONES

A chart prepared by the researchers at University of Oxford shows a timeline of the development of vaccines against humanity's biggest killers. The shortest development period for a vaccine before the coronavirus pandemic was measles (1953-1963, US). This stands in contrast to malaria, whose cause was identified in 1880 but remains without a vaccine



A nurse prepares a dose of a Covid-19 coronavirus vaccine in Bangkok | AP



Nations expand Covid-19 vaccine patent waiver proposal at WTO

MEDICINE

GENEVA: Dozens of countries have revised a proposal at the WTO for patent waivers for medical tools needed to combat Covid, insisting it must be broader than just vaccines, non-governmental organisations said Saturday.

More than 60 countries have presented a revision of their text before the World Trade Organization on ditching intellectual property protections for Covid-19 jabs and other medical tools while the pandemic rages, according to the Doctors Without Borders (MSF) charity and NGO Knowledge Ecology International (KEI).

KEI published what it said was the revised text, which pushed for the waiver to be broad and long-lasting.

The WTO did not immediately verify the authenticity of the document, but a Western diplomat close to the waiver discussions confirmed it was genuine and had been distributed to all WTO members.

That text said the waiver should cover all medical "prevention, treatment and containment" tools needed to battle Covid.

In addition to vaccines, it should include treatments, diagnostics, vaccines, medical devices and protective equipment, along with the material and components needed to produce them, it said.

It also said the waiver should last for "at least three years" from the date it takes effect, following which, the WTO's General Council should determine whether it could be lifted or should be prolonged.

The WTO has since October faced calls led by India and South Africa for the temporary removal of IP protections.

'Father of hybrid rice' Yuan Longping dies

SCIENCE

TAIPEI: Yuan Longping, a Chinese scientist who developed higher-yield rice varieties that helped feed people around the world, died Saturday at a hospital in the southern city of Changsha, the Xinhua News agency reported. He was 91.

Yuan spent his life researching rice and was a household name in China, known by the nickname "Father of Hybrid Rice." Worldwide, a fifth of all rice now comes from species created by hybrid rice following Yuan's breakthrough discoveries, according to the website of the World Food Prize, which he won in 2004.On Saturday afternoon, large crowds honored the scientist by marching past the hospital in Hunan province where he died, local media reported, calling out phrases such as: "Grandpa Ye, have a good journey!"

It was in the 1970s when Yuan achieved the breakthroughs that would make him a household name. He developed a hybrid strain of rice that recorded an annual yield 20% higher than existing varieties — meaning it could feed an extra 70 million people a year, according to Xinhua.His work helped transform China from "food deficiency to food security" within three decades, according to the World Food Prize, which was created by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Norman Borlaug in 1986 to recognize scientists and others who have improved the quality and availability of food.

Yuan and his team worked with dozens of countries around the world to address issues of food security as well as malnutrition. Even in his later years, Yuan did not stop doing research. In 2017, working with a Hunan agricultural school, he helped create a strain of low-cadmium indica rice for areas suffering from heavy metal pollution, reducing the amount of cadmium in rice by more than 90%.

FIRST DRIVE ON RED PLANT

China's Zhurong rover leaves landing pad, begins roaming Mars

SPACE

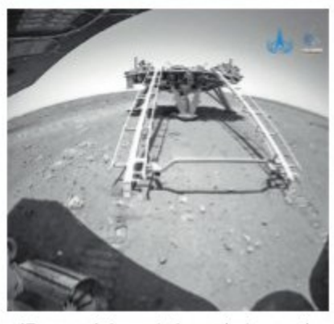
TAIPEI: China's Mars rover drove from its landing platform and began exploring the surface on Saturday, state-run Xinhua news agency said, making the country only the second nation to land and operate a rover on the Red Planet.

The launch last July of the Tianwen-1 Mars probe, which carried the Zhurong rover, marked a major milestone in China's space programme.

Tianwen-1 touched down on a vast northern lava plain known as the Utopia Planitia a week ago and beamed back its first photos of the surface a few days later. The Mars probe and rover are expected to spend around three months taking photos, harvesting geographical data, and collecting and analysing rock samples.

The six-wheeled, solar-powered, 240 kg Zhurong is named after a Chinese mythical fire god. China has now sent astronauts into space, powered probes to the Moon and landed a rover on Mars -- the most prestigious of all prizes in the contest for dominion of space.

The United States and Russia are the only other countries to have reached Mars, and only the former has operated a rover on the surface.



(Topmost) An artist's rendering made available by the China National Space Administration shows the Zhurong rover and a lander platform on Mars. Above, a picture taken by the rover of the landing platform on the Red Planet

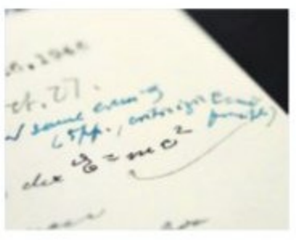
Several US, Russian and European attempts to land rovers on Mars have failed in the past, most recently in 2016 with the crash-landing of the Schiaparelli joint Russian-European spacecraft.

The latest successful arrival came in February, when US space agency NASA landed its rover Perseverance, which has since been exploring the planet. The US rover launched a small helicopter on Mars which was the first-ever powered flight on another planet.

China has come a long way in its race to catch up with the United States and Russia, whose astronauts and cosmonauts have decades of experience in space exploration. It successfully launched the first module of its new space station last month with hopes of having it crewed by 2022.

FACT OF THE MATTER

Letter with E=mc² sold



PHYSICS

A letter written by Albert Einstein in which he writes out his famous E = mc2 equation has sold at auction for more than $1.2 million, about three times more than it was expected to get, Boston-based RR Auction said Friday. Archivists at the Einstein Papers Project at the California Institute of Technology and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem say there are only three other known examples of Einstein writing the world-changing equation in his own hand. This fourth example, the only one in a private collection, only became public recently, according to RR Auction, which had expected it to sell for about $400,000.

Ecological disaster

ENVIRONMENT

Hundreds of firefighters battled Greece's first major forest fire of the summer on Saturday, as experts warned of a "huge ecological disaster" in the nature conservation area near Athens. Some 54 percent of the dense and hitherto protected pine forests have been burnt, the leftist Avghi daily said. And 6.1% of the mountain range is part of the European Union's Natura 2000 network of nature conservation sites. Euthymios Lekkas, professor of environmental disaster management at the University of Athens, said the fires have burnt over 55 km² of pine forest and other land, some of it agricultural.

EXTREME RADIATION

New detector spots ultra high-energy gamma rays from surprising cosmic sources

ASTRONOMY

HAIZI MOUNTAIN, China: Astrophysicist Cao Zhen opens a steel hatch on a windswept Tibetan Plateau and climbs down a ladder into inky darkness. His flashlight picks out a boat floating on a pool of purified water above thousands of glittering orbs the size of beachballs.

He's inside a $175 million observatory that isn't technically complete but has already discovered something tantalizing: bursts of gamma rays from outer space that may someday help explain how matter is created and distributed across the universe.

The Large High Altitude Air Shower Observatory, the biggest device of its kind, has detected a dozen sources of ultra high-energy gamma rays, according to a study in the journal Nature, from what Cao calls "many hot spots," in our Milky Way galaxy.

Gamma rays with such high energy have never been detected before, and the findings suggest these rays can come not just from dying stars, but are also generated inside massive young stars.

"These results are really stunning — some of the most exciting I have ever seen," said Alan Watson, an astrophysicist working with the Pierre Auger Observatory in Argentina.

Cao's team traced 530 high-energy gamma rays to 12 sources including a massive cluster of young stars called the Cygnus Cocoon and the interstellar cloud called the Crab Nebula. Gamma rays are a type of extreme radiation generated by the hottest and brightest explosions in the universe, like when a large star implodes. Those implosions also create the matter that make up planets — and everything that lives on them, including us. Of all the electromagnetic waves in the universe, gamma rays have the smallest wavelengths and the most energy. They can release more energy in 10 seconds than our sun in 10 billion years.

At China's Large High-Altitude Air Shower Observatory, a building housing a water-filled cavern with sensors for Cherenkov light is surrounded by dirt-covered instruments that detect muon particles originating from outer space| AP

The pool of purified water at LHAASO that Cao paddled across measures the subatomic shrapnel — the "air shower" in the observatory's name — created when gamma rays and high energy particles called cosmic rays crash into the Earth's atmosphere.

The shrapnel includes mysterious particles called muons that can be seen as faint blue flashes known as Cherenkov radiation in the observatory's dark water. The array of 3,120 beachball-sized globes contain tiny sensors that measure the radiation. "We can trace these gamma rays back to their source in the sky," said Cao, dressed in blue scrubs to keep the water clean. "We can find something new."

LHAASO is one of dozens of devices on Earth and in orbit — suspended in ice tunnels in Antarctica or inside toaster-sized satellites — trying to understand how matter such as carbon, O_2 and Fe came to be.